

CITY UNIVERSITY

A Framework for delivering legal research skills training online via a Virtual Learning Environment to be implemented at the School of Oriental and African Studies.

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September 2005

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of MSc in Information Science

Abstract

This research project aimed generally to investigate the use of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) to deliver legal research skills training at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). Legal research skills are an increasingly important part of students' studies. It is vital that law graduates are equipped with the necessary skills to research a legal problem adequately to become a competent legal practitioner. As SOAS law students study not only English and EU law, but also the laws of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, they need to be able to develop research skills that enable them to find relevant regional material effectively, accurately and successfully.

However, a number of problems have come to light at SOAS which have initiated a change in the way legal research skills training is currently delivered – including the issue of student retention, high numbers of international students, diversity of students' backgrounds and skills, and their different information needs. Thus, an investigation was undertaken into how SOAS can use the capabilities of a VLE to help change the current approach to legal research skills training.

A questionnaire was delivered to all law students currently studying at SOAS to discover their specific information needs relating to legal research skills. Additionally, an evaluation policy was constructed using previous research and the experience of other institutions, to evaluate two existing legal research skills programmes available in the UK and Australia. The results of this evaluation and questionnaire help to inform the construction of the framework.

The results provided a general framework for the delivery of legal research skills training to undergraduate students at SOAS. By including the more generic skills as well as specific legal research skills, this framework has a wider application and can, therefore, be used, compared and adapted for further research by other institutions.

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the University of Melbourne and Manchester Metropolitan University for allowing me access to their VLEs. I would also like to thank Susannah Quinsee my supervisor for her consistent support and guidance. In addition, thank you to all those who contributed their views and opinions.

Above all, I wish to thank my family, friends and work colleagues for their moral support and confidence.

1. Introduction

Developing legal research skills is an important part of a lawyers training. It can provide a law firm with a competitive advantage and can mean the difference between providing good or bad advice to a client. The delivery of such skills at academic level varies throughout the United Kingdom - from face-to-face presentations to online courses. At the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), a number of problems have come to light which have initiated a change in the way legal research skills training is currently delivered. With the recent introduction of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) at SOAS, a new approach to the delivery of such skills can be undertaken - one that can cater for the different learning needs of SOAS students.

The term 'virtual learning environment' refers to the components in which learners and tutors participate in online interactions of various kinds, including online learning (JISC website). Therefore, a VLE is designed to enhance a student's learning experience by delivering training through electronic means.

This project will investigate how SOAS can utilise the capabilities of a VLE to improve the way legal research skills are presently taught and produce a framework on how to deliver legal research skills training particularly for SOAS students online via VLE. This framework can be used, compared and adapted for further research by other institutions.

There are many benefits to using the tools available within a VLE, but any online course needs careful and thoughtful design to ensure that these tools are being used to their full advantage (JISC InfoNet website). Consequently, an evaluation of current legal research skills training programmes will be undertaken in order to discover the features that are most effective and successful in teaching such skills. This project will explore the approaches used to evaluate VLEs in general and use the experience of various institutions implementing their own online courses, to develop a policy for evaluating online legal research skills training programmes. This policy will be used to evaluate two online courses currently providing skills training to undergraduate law students within the UK and Australia. This project will further investigate the needs of SOAS students in terms of legal research skills - to gain a better understanding of how best to deliver such training. The findings from both of these will facilitate the design of an online legal research skills training course for SOAS students.

This present chapter (1) provides an overview of the project and later clarifies the aims and objectives followed by the projects scope and definition. It then discusses the research background and explains the reasons for undertaking this project. To support this project; a substantial literature search was conducted to gather sufficient background knowledge about legal research skills and VLEs. Chapter 2 discusses the findings of the search and explores the themes surrounding the topic of legal research skills training and the use of a VLE to deliver them. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used to gather and analyse data obtained from current SOAS students regarding their skills training. It further provides a full discussion on the methods used to evaluate two online legal research skills training programmes along with a description of how the evaluation policy was developed and constructed. The results of the research are fully discussed in chapter 4, while chapter 5 provides an overview of the SOAS framework and further summarises the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The main aim of this project is to produce a framework for delivering legal research skills training online via a VLE for undergraduate students studying at SOAS.

In order to gather recommendations to create this framework, a number of objectives need to be met. These are as follows:

- To investigate the needs of SOAS students in terms of legal skills training – looking specifically at what factors affect the teaching of legal research skills to students, how they perceive the current training sessions, and how they regard legal research skills in general.
- To produce an evaluation policy to evaluate online legal research skills training by investigating current research into the evaluation of VLEs and online legal research skills courses.
- To evaluate, using the policy defined above, two current legal research skills training programs – looking specifically at which elements are most effective and successful at teaching legal research skills.

1.2 Scope and Definition

The teaching of legal research skills will be examined as opposed to general information skills. This is due to the very nature of legal material. Learning legal research skills is an integral part of a law degree and the teaching of such skills require a different approach. The skills needed at undergraduate level unlike at postgraduate level are different, and also require a different approach. A postgraduate student will already have had legal training - some form of legal research skills training will have taken place. Whereas, an undergraduate student will have little knowledge of law or the skills needed to find different types of resources and materials. They will have to learn the very basics of researching legal materials, and use more general resources and databases, whilst a postgraduate student will need to find more detailed areas of law and use specific resources catered for their particular searches. For this reason, the focus will be on the research skills needed at undergraduate level.

As the aim is to deliver legal research skills training via a VLE an investigation into the tools available through a VLE, rather than through the internet, will be undertaken. There are many benefits to using a VLE as opposed to a website as discussed below in section 2.3. This research aims to investigate how other institutions have used the technological capabilities of a VLE to teach legal research skills.

The project will be looking at providing a framework for SOAS students only, as being a centre for the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East; the students' research needs are different to other undergraduate law students studying in the UK, as discussed later. Due to the problems SOAS undergraduate students' face at the moment in the way they learn legal skills, it is important to provide a tool that will further help their studies.

1.3 Research Context

The reason for this research project stems from the problem SOAS undergraduate students face in learning legal research skills. Learning and understanding legal rules is a vitally important part of legal education, but the skills associated with the study of law (e.g. how to find, cite and read a case, how to find key resources for research, how to use legal information) are equally important. Law students need to be prepared for working in the commercial sector and law firms will place legal skills as one of the top attributes required by law graduates. Further, small law firms will expect graduates they

recruit to do their own research – they will not have enough staff to support those who do not have the relevant skills. Aside to this, SOAS law students have different research needs to other University law students.

SOAS is the leading centre of Asian and African studies in the western world and its law students study not only UK and EU law but also the laws of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. The courses within the undergraduate law degree are taught, as far as possible, in a comparative or international manner. This means that students must also study certain specialized courses in selected areas (for example, Islamic law, Chinese law, Hindu law etc.). Thus, students must be able to search for international and regional materials which require knowledge of a diverse range of databases and websites. It is important to be able to understand how to use a variety of resources and to search them effectively and accurately. Therefore, SOAS law students have to acquire additional research skills over and above those of a regular undergraduate studying a law degree elsewhere in the UK.

Previously, at SOAS there was not a law librarian to deliver legal research skills. They were taught instead by first year undergraduate law lecturers, relying on their own presentations and those of representatives from the two main legal subscription databases (Westlaw and LexisNexis). However, this approach was not ideal as it did not cover every aspect to learning legal research skills. Lecturers are not able to research quite often and, therefore, may not be aware of new developments in databases, the availability of other resources or even free legal websites.

At present, the law librarian delivers voluntary skills sessions to SOAS students in a simple presentation format. The students are shown how to find legal information with the relevant resources displayed and discussed. However, these sessions can be delivered to a large number of students at one time and it can be difficult to add a practical hands-on element. This lack of interactivity is not very engaging for the students and is not conducive to a good learning environment. Due to the size of some sessions, it can also be difficult to ensure all students have understood the relevant skills - to know how and where to access relevant legal information. Alternatively, workshops are sometimes incorporated - where students work through a booklet of questions and learn how to use the databases. This form of blended learning is generally much more interactive. However, there is rarely enough time for the student to go through all aspects of the databases and, therefore, may not learn the weakness and strengths of each resource. These current approaches often lack the ability to

cater for different learning styles and are, therefore, not very practical in terms of actually teaching the students and helping them to develop legal research skills.

Further, as these sessions are also purely voluntary there is a danger that they can be poorly attended. Many students may be missing out on vital skills training and do not know how to find help when it comes to researching coursework, or may not even attempt to do so.

There is a further problem involving the retention of students. There has been a relatively high drop out rate for undergraduate law students, which could be for a variety of reasons. In 2002 around 90 new students registered for the first year of the LLB course, during that year about 10% withdrew from the course. In 2003 around 7% withdrew. These may be relatively small percentages, yet when the number of students actually registering is factored, this percentage can be a significant amount. Attending university for the first time can often be an overwhelming experience and the fact that SOAS is primarily for post-graduate or research studies could contribute to this; the undergraduate law students are one of the few 18-21 year olds attending SOAS at the moment. Likewise, the lack of proper skills training could also be a contributing factor, as students might feel daunted and ill prepared for researching and completing coursework. If students do not feel confident in researching and completing assignments, they may feel too overwhelmed to continue their studies – believing it to be too difficult.

A VLE was introduced at SOAS in 2004 and is now being used across the school for all modules. Students are becoming familiar with this form of e-learning and are demanding more from it. The main idea for this project is to use this VLE to help with the retention of students. A more flexible approach to teaching legal research skills can be developed using such a VLE platform. Teaching legal skills online will help students with their research so that they do not feel so overwhelmed when researching coursework. Students would be able to access the training sessions at anytime and so those who would not normally attend voluntary sessions can still receive the same training. Further, the more practical hands-on approach may benefit those who find the current approach unhelpful. For instance, there are a number of overseas students whose first language is not English and who find the current skills sessions difficult to understand. By delivering skills sessions online, these students will be able to go through the tutorial in their own time and as many times as they wish – allowing the training to be more self-paced and timely.

2. Literature Review

This literature review will serve two functions. Firstly, it will provide a discussion on the key themes within current research concerning the teaching of legal research skills. Secondly, it will explore the idea of using a VLE to deliver legal research skills training.

2.1 Legal Research Skills

“Recently, there has been increasing focus on the acquisition of research skills by law undergraduates. One reason for this interest is a belief that many such students do not acquire an adequate level of research skills by the time they graduate”

(Widdison, 2002)

There is a growing recognition, within the academic sector, of the importance of providing legal research skills training for law students as referred to above. It is vital that law graduates are equipped with the necessary skills to research a legal problem adequately in order to become a competent legal practitioner. Therefore, Universities should look to improve the legal research skills training they provide and should consider such training as an essential element of a qualifying law degree.

So what do we mean by legal research skills? Unfortunately, there has been very little literature defining the term. What is clear is that law students will need to acquire different research skills to other students. For instance, a standard set of research skills which can be applied to any subject includes the ability to:

- Define a topic and plan a search
- Get hold of information
- Evaluate information
- Organise and use information
- Communicate and review information (Big Blue Project website)

Clinch (1999), in his discussion on the meaning of the term legal research skills, concludes that the main generic skills of legal research fall into three categories:

- Identifying and analyzing a problem

- Finding appropriate information to solve the problem
 - Presenting the results of the analysis and research in an appropriate manner.
- (p.11)

However, due to the very nature of law where primary resources (cases and legislation) are used to support a legal argument or decision, legal research skills will be slightly different. At a basic level, legal research skills can be described as “the skills students need to acquire as part of their degree and professional studies and eventually employ when in legal practice.” (Clinch, 1999:15) These skills will include basic researching in areas of law - identifying and finding relevant legal sources and materials. Many also believe that the objective of teaching legal research skills is to teach students to develop analytical skills in order to “think like a lawyer” (Berring & Vanden Heuvel, 1990). Likewise, Callister (2003) argues that students should be taught how to “solve problems in ways that will transcend the classroom and graduation into their careers” (p.23).

Lawyers are major users of information – it is a vital part of their job and they must be able to research effectively in order to reach a suitable solution. Once a student qualifies and begins practicing law they will require information to solve a variety of legal problems and will need to consult different resources, if they do not perform an adequate search they might miss valuable information and, therefore, jeopardise their case. As Otike (1999) explains:

“...the position lawyers take and the arguments they make are based on information. The resultant court decisions have a significant impact on the people involved, and in some cases, set precedent for future decisions. The lawyer may require information to solve a variety of legal problems. To arrive at a reasonable solution to a problem, the lawyer may need to consult widely differing sources.” (p.20)

Therefore, lawyers and students need to be taught how to undertake complete and thorough research in order to carry out their work effectively.

To underline the importance of learning such skills, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) laid down certain benchmark statements which describe the level a student has to reach in order to gain a degree in law. These statements define what can be expected of a law graduate in terms of the techniques and skills needed and include the basic ability to:

- Identify and retrieve up-to-date legal information, using paper and electronic sources
- Use primary and secondary legal sources relevant to the topic under study.
- Demonstrate an ability to be able to undertake independent research in areas of law which he or she has not previously studied starting from standard legal information sources
- Be able to identify and use primary legal sources and journals relevant to topic under study
- Be able to identify contemporary debates and engage with these while accurately reporting the law in an area.

(QAA Benchmark Statements for Law website)

As it is important to ensure that the level of achievement is similar across the UK, all universities are advised to follow these statements when developing courses. This helps to maintain appropriate high standards and the delivery of good quality education.

The Law Society and the Bar Council, the validating bodies for solicitors and barristers respectively, decided to build upon these QAA benchmark statements. Both are responsible for laying down the qualification regulations for anyone seeking to qualify as a solicitor or as a barrister. The Joint Statement on Qualifying Law Degrees, prepared jointly by the Law Society and the Bar Council, sets out the conditions a law degree course must meet in order to be termed a 'qualifying law degree'. It has been approved by the Lord Chancellor and came into effect for all law degrees commenced after 1 September 2001.

The Joint Statement makes it clear that institutions are expected to set their standards of achievement above the Benchmark. The statement further went on to identify additional features that are required for recruits to the legal professions:

- The ability to use standard paper and electronic resources to produce up-to-date information
- The intellectual and practical skills needed to research and analyse the law from primary resources on specific matters; and to apply the findings of such work to the solution of legal problems
- To conduct efficient searches of websites to locate relevant information

(Joint Statement on Qualifying Law Degrees, 2001)

It is clear that both the benchmark standards and joint statement recognise the importance of legal research skills. They also reinforce the view that such skills are an essential element for a qualifying law degree. However, despite their importance, there is a definite decline in the legal research skills of law graduates. Lynch (1997) recognises that “graduates rarely have adequate research skills”. There is also a general consensus that law firms are concerned about trainee solicitors’ legal research skills. As Pearman (2001) points out, for a firm “to remain competitive, not only is it important to make sure work is carried out efficiently, but also that it is carried out at the right level”. Mosley (2004) researched the application of research skills in solicitor’s offices and discovered that once trainees were faced with real research problems, it was:

“...obvious that they often had only surface knowledge of a database. They did not seem to be aware of the scope of a database, its currency and its limitations... [and could not]...recognise when they had not got the correct information” (p.49).

This can certainly be a problem when a student goes on to qualify as a lawyer and proceeds to give “bad” advice. A report by the Consumer Association for the Which? magazine in 1995 found that 19 out of 20 solicitors failed to give best advice on a commonplace consumer problem! A further survey in 2004 listed the top ten complaints about solicitors in England and Wales. These included complaints that clients were given inaccurate or incomplete information (48%) and that clients were given bad advice (38%). This just goes to show the lack of proper research skills and how important it is for a graduate in law to develop these skills, as Mosley (2004) suggests, “students need to learn the core research skills and a better understanding of the nature and structure of legal materials is needed” (p.50).

This problem does not seem to be isolated to the United Kingdom. In the United States, legal research skills are also considered one of the most fundamental skills a lawyer can possess. The American Bar Association (ABA) – the American equivalent of The Law Society and the Bar Council combined – laid down certain standards highlighting the need to help law students gain legal research proficiency. Standard 302(a) reads:

“A law school shall offer to all students...: (1) instruction in the substantive law, values and skills (including legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, problem solving and oral and written communication) generally regarded as necessary to effective and responsible participation in the legal profession.”

Despite this, law graduates are still regarded as having inadequate research skills - Callister (2003) reveals that there has been dissatisfaction with law students since 1902! Howland & Lewis (1990) agree that “there is a growing awareness among law librarians and practicing attorneys that the research skills of law students and recent law school graduates are painfully inadequate and are perhaps becoming increasingly so” (p.389).

As Callister (2003) points out there is obviously a “need for more finely tuned research skills”. Clearly, the current skills training delivered by many Universities needs to be improved. Wolski (2002) suggests that “while schools may give students the opportunity to experience skills in simulations, they frequently fail to adequately prepare students for those experiences and to help them process what they have learned through experience” (p.294). Therefore, not only must students be given adequate and flexible training, covering all aspects of legal research, they must also be able to transfer those skills into the real world. As Berring (1994) argues:

“We now need research training that is devoted to research skills, that sees those skills as useful and vital. Finding information, information of all sorts, not just cases will be a vital function of the twenty-first century lawyer” (p.33).

2.2 Embedding vs. Standalone

“[The] necessity to build IT and information literacy skills into academic curriculums for lawyers is becoming increasingly important throughout the common law world”

(Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004)

There is a need to ensure that legal research skills training are delivered effectively to all students and this leads to the question of how best to teach such skills. Should skills sessions be embedded into the course curriculum so that they are incorporated within the main course of study? Or should they be treated as a separate subject so they are removed from the subject context?

Voluntary sessions are usually arranged by library staff and involve the teaching of research skills irrespective of the students’ studies and without the support of academic staff. Students are rarely encouraged to attend these sessions as they are not part of

their course. Whereas, embedding skills into the course can simply include skills development within the learning outcomes of a course or even the complete redesign of the curriculum. This helps to “ensure that skills are developed in concert with discipline knowledge” (Meredith, 2005)

There has certainly been an increase in the number of universities integrating legal research skills sessions into the curriculum. The Society for Legal Scholars (SLS) and the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL), in their survey of academic law libraries in 2002/3, noted that there has been a move away from stand-alone skills sessions and a move towards the integration of sessions within a module. In 2003, 77% of the universities surveyed had skills sessions timetabled into the undergraduate course, as opposed to 59% in 2001. Thus, universities are realising the benefits of embedding skills sessions and how effective it can be in teaching legal research skills.

The Big Blue project also explored this area when they surveyed the present practice of information skills training within higher education. The project (as stated on their website) “established a blueprint for the future, ensuring a coherent approach to the development of an information literate student population in the UK.” It provided two toolkits designed to support universities that want to improve existing information skills training – one toolkit detailed how to deliver skills training by integrating them into the course curriculum. The project noted that by delivering skills sessions in this way, students attend and receive credit for skills training, therefore, “information skills becomes an accepted subject of study rather than an optional add-on or ‘soft-skill’”. They further stated that:

“Integration into the curriculum is arguably most successful when developed as part of an institution-wide policy... [where]...partnerships are formed to aid curriculum development and provide support for the delivery of initiatives and new teaching strategies”.

In other words, for this model to be successful it is vital that academic staff support the idea of embedding skills training into their course. This not only lends weight to the importance of learning skills, but also encourages students to view such training as part of the core subjects every student needs to learn. This was the experience of Manchester Metropolitan University where a legal research skills course (PoLeR) was integrated into the Legal Practice Course (LPC) for trainee solicitors. As stated on the website, they found that as the academic staff helped support the new course it

“encouraged students to view PoLeR as a compulsory part of the course, not simply an optional extra provided by the Library”.

Further to this, it has been argued that students will often not complete tasks or workshops (even if it helps them develop the relevant skills) unless it is related to their current studies or they are being assessed (Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004). Dewald (1999) agrees that

“Library instruction is best received when it is course-related, and specifically assignment-related. Students are most receptive to library instruction when they can see its immediate benefit to their course work or to an assignment that they face”.

This is clear when you look at stand-alone or voluntary sessions where there is certainly little incentive for students to attend - they are seldom related to their studies and do not require a student to complete any assessment. They are, therefore, poorly attended and ineffectual. To overcome this problem, the University of Melbourne has incorporated legal research training into the undergraduate course. It is now a “hurdle requirement” which must be completed successfully as part of the first year before a student is allowed to continue their studies. This means that students must complete their skills training and successfully pass all assessments before they can move on to learn other areas of law.

For effective skills training, therefore, it is important that the “instruction is course-related (and specifically assignment related and embedded in the course of study)” (Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004) and not treated as a ‘bolt-on set of generic skills’ (Clinch, 2004). However, this is certainly not the ideal situation found at SOAS - where skills sessions are voluntary and students and lecturers alike do not regard them as being of paramount importance.

2.3 Virtual Learning Environments

“VLEs should provide opportunities to improve the quality and variety of teaching and learning that are not being achieved using current methods”

(Britain & Liber, 1999)

There are a number of problems relating to the delivery of legal research skills at SOAS that have been discussed above. These include:

- Current approach to teaching legal research skills is unsuccessful and ineffective
- Insufficient time to teach legal research skills well
- Number of International students – different approaches to teaching need to be taken.
- Lack of curriculum support – skills sessions are not embedded into the course

One way to overcome these problems and to improve the current approach to teaching legal research skills is to use the technological capabilities of a VLE and combine the lecture-style presentation with practical exercises.

It is clear that Universities are becoming more aware of VLEs and are now more likely to provide courses online. The UCISA survey in 2003 shows that there is a widespread up-take of VLEs. The surveys conducted in March 2001 and 2003 noted that 86% of higher education institutions within the UK are using a VLE. One reason given for why institutions wish to use a VLE is to enhance teaching and learning, where the UCISA survey notes that around 65.9% of institutions state this as the main reason for establishing online courses. The increase in VLE use shows that institutions regard it as an essential feature to help deliver courses. It can also be argued that if a law course is to compete with other institutions it is important for them to start using the available e-learning technology.

A VLE allows for a variety of integration where courses can be fully implemented within the VLE or where there is limited integration. Barber (2004) discusses the spectrum of involvement and how far a skills training program should go along the route of integration – from “co-habiting” to being “just good friends” which can involve just including a link to library resources. The idea of library instruction “co-habiting” with a VLE can be seen through the experience of Manchester Metropolitan University. Practical Legal Research assignments are only released onto the VLE of a particular student when a minimum of a 50% score has been achieved on the PoLeR exercises. Since PoLeR was introduced the pass rate for the Practical Legal Research has gone from 75% to 98%.

Therefore, fully integrating a legal research skills program within a VLE can help overcome the lack of curriculum support. With the increased use of VLEs it can be

argued that students will become used to studying and learning online, and will become more demanding. Students may start to expect other courses including skills training to be available online, thereby increasing the pressure on institutions to embed such training courses within the curriculum.

There are many advantages to using a VLE over a website, including the belief that the VLE page can become personal to the user (Barber, 2004) and students will then become more familiar with accessing materials online. Secker (2004) also believes that another benefit to using a VLE “is that the course will be easier to set up and not require specialist web design skills” (p.17).

Further advantages are highlighted by Harradine (2001), who states that the “selling point of an online course is the ability to study when and where it is convenient for them.” The fact that a VLE can provide the flexibility of time and place is an invaluable feature and helps to provide a more supportive and effective approach to the delivery of skills training.

It is important that students are able to access skills training and any accompanying materials wherever they wish. Patrick & Stant (1999) agree and state that “we need to take advantage of the increasing availability of information online, allowing our students to access information from their homes or workplaces”. A VLE differs from a traditional face-to-face environment as it frees students from any geographical constraints and allows them to receive skills training when they need it the most, at home, work or on campus.

Likewise, a VLE also helps free students from any time constraints as Piccoli et al (2001) point out, students are able to retain control as to when they engage in the learning experience. In a traditional environment, students cannot control the pace or order in which material is delivered. They cannot skip over topics already covered or any that they already know. Students are also unable to get the lecturer to repeat an idea or topic until they understand it as there is usually a limited time period. In fact, during the current skills training delivered to SOAS students, the law librarian is rarely asked any questions or asked to repeat a previous point. In a VLE, responsibility for learning shifts to the students themselves as they are able to explore the course materials at their own pace. Students are able to repeat entire lectures, or any component of them at will and repeatedly (Piccoli et al, 2001).

As discussed in section 1.3 above, the current skills training sessions use a uniform style that ignores the variety of learning styles of SOAS students. Due to the diversity of SOAS students (through age, experience, background, culture, education and expectations) it is difficult to ensure effective and thorough legal research skills training is delivered in a face-to-face setting. One way to overcome this is to deliver skills training through a VLE. Some students will find learning online easier by engaging in an online discussion as opposed to face-to-face discussion. Likewise, students may learn best in actually carrying out tasks on databases rather than listening to how to do it (JISC InfoNet website). Indeed, Piccoli et al (2001) notes that “some individuals who are comfortable with technology and who have positive attitudes toward it should thrive due to low levels of anxiety and likely excitement with the learning environment”. As stated by Britain & Liber (1999), the benefit of VLEs lie in their potential to support styles of learning that cannot be dealt with in traditional methods. Piccoli et al (2001) declares that VLEs depart considerably from the traditional model and shifts much of the responsibility for learning to the students. Therefore, a VLE can accommodate different student learning styles by incorporating a more student-centred approach to learning.

Furthermore, a VLE also enables active learning, defined by Dewald (1999) as exercises conducted by students online, involving the use of assessment tools such as multiple choice or simple exercises. These assignments can be easily constructed and are conducted by the student online where instant feedback can be provided. Piccoli et al (2001) believes that “it is very important to evaluate the learners’ propensity to actually apply what they have learned and the confidence they have developed in their ability” (p.410). Self-tests can be used by students for quick concept-checking and formative feedback (JISC InfoNet website) – the purpose of which is to improve the quality of student learning and can help inform the future development of the course. Quizzes can provide guidance for both the lecturer and student; the results can highlight key areas that have not been fully understood by the student and which the lecturer can cover in later sessions (JISC InfoNet website). Therefore, the use of self-tests throughout the course and the instant feedback provided, allows the student to evaluate their own progress and helps contribute to their development of effective legal research skills. Students are able to see what they have learned and this, in turn, gives them confidence in their ability.

Likewise, a student will require access to a full range of instructional materials, such as database guides and presentations, in order to develop comprehensive research skills. A VLE will provide access to a wide range of resources available in a variety of

different formats to enable those with differing learning styles (Piccoli et al, 2001). A VLE can use a variety of delivery methods including; text, hypertext graphics, streaming audio and video, computer animations, simulations and, as mentioned above, embedded tests (Piccoli et al, 2001). A VLE will also ensure that any information is constantly refreshed and updated (Barber, 2004) and only relevant, useful materials will be available. Therefore, A VLE can change the approach taken to teaching legal research skills by allowing students to access relevant material independently, follow different paths through it and can utilize different material displays (Piccoli et al, 2001).

Perhaps the most important feature of a VLE is that it allows for communication and interaction among participants (Piccoli et al, 2001). Integrated communication tools such as discussion boards; chat rooms etc. allow interaction between students and lecturers. It enables students, who would not ask a question during lectures, to feel more confident in posting a message online and asking for help. Students can also discuss issues with other students and allows them to help each other. In this respect, a VLE is able to help build a community feel and could even alleviate the problem of retention. By allowing students to interact with each other within an online environment, new students would be able to settle into their surroundings more easily and would be able to find help among their peers.

There are many benefits to using a VLE to deliver skills training. As Britain & Liber (1999) state, VLEs are:

“...intended not simply to reproduce the classroom environment ‘online’, but to use the technology to provide learners with new tools to facilitate their learning. They aim to accommodate a wider range of learning styles and goals, to encourage collaborative and resource-based learning and to allow greater sharing and re-use of resources”.

A VLE can provide opportunities for practice and recall when convenient for students, especially without others seeing the mistakes they have made. They can find appropriate materials they need in formats they like. They can receive immediate feedback in simulations and quizzes rather than waiting for the tutor to respond in the face-to-face session (JISC InfoNet Website). Further, the use of a VLE can build a sense of community for undergraduate students where they can assist each other and get further help when they need it at anytime, anywhere. The interactive features of a VLE mean that the skills training can reach more students with different learning styles – thereby making the training more effective.

Ultimately, by allowing a student access to skills training online, the outcome is a student who has learned skills and concepts at the time he or she seeks those skills for an individual or assignment based purpose (Dewald, 1999).

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The first section of the methodology will look at the development of an evaluation policy used to assess two VLEs that provide a full legal research skills training programme. The second section will look at the design and delivery of a questionnaire used to gather data from current SOAS students. These chosen methodologies will be examined along with any limitations or problems arising.

3.2 Evaluation Policy

In order to construct a framework for delivering legal research skills training online, there needs to be an investigation into what current online tutorials actually exist. Certain research needs to be undertaken looking at what specific training these tools provide, whether they work and how effective they are at teaching such skills.

It was important to enquire at various universities within the United Kingdom to determine whether any suitable online tutorials providing skills training for undergraduate students actually existed. During this inquiry it was discovered that there has been little development in this area. Very few institutions provided appropriate skills training online. Many universities still used face-to-face sessions to deliver their legal research skills training and others had not made any comprehensive online tutorials despite using VLE technology. In fact, most online tutorials were in a pilot stage only and were, therefore, unsuitable for this study. This could be due to the fact that most institutions are implementing institution-wide initiatives to use VLEs (like SOAS) and are just realising the benefit of using VLEs for the purposes of skills training.

As stated above, for this study it was decided to concentrate on training sessions designed for undergraduate students only. As the construction of the framework is aimed at first year undergraduate SOAS students, it was important to focus on any tools that are aimed at those students. Undergraduates need to have a general, wide knowledge of all aspects of legal research whereas post graduate students have more specific needs - they need to learn how to use different resources and databases. By

concentrating on undergraduate students, it ensures that all key areas of teaching legal research skills are covered.

It was discovered that two universities (Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Melbourne) have made significant progress in this area producing complete online courses relating to legal research skills training. In order to access these skills training courses permission needed to be granted by the home institution as they were both password protected. This meant that access was for a limited period only, as in the case of the University of Melbourne (see below) - the username and passwords expired after two weeks. However, this enforced time limit served a useful purpose as it provided the opportunity to focus on the tutorial like a student and to see it in the eyes of a first-time user. This also helped to assess the usability and functionality of both tutorials. Full access to all areas of the tutorial was granted which meant that any interactive activities could be performed and all functions of the VLE that were used could be tested.

3.2.1 Manchester Metropolitan University

The Manchester Metropolitan University, in collaboration with the Big Blue Project, designed one online course, PoLeR (Practical Online Legal Research) for LPC and BVC law students. They further expanded these to include an 'InfoSkills' training session designed for first year undergraduates. These courses were prompted by the fact that the University was keen to use the VLE technology to develop a more flexible approach to the delivery of legal research skills training. All of these courses have been produced for use on the institutions VLE (WebCT), incorporating various e-learning tools and techniques, which makes it an ideal candidate for this project.

The InfoSkills tutorial was chosen mainly as it has been implemented already for a number of years and is directed solely at undergraduate students. It has been tried and tested with previous law students so has already been evaluated and improved for those who will use it in the future.

3.2.2 University of Melbourne

Due to the lack of relevant tutorials in the United Kingdom, it was necessary to expand the field and look elsewhere. After researching institutions around the world, it was

discovered that the University of Melbourne, in particular, has made considerable progress in the development of online legal research skills tutorials. The University has designed a unique Legal Information Skills Tutorial (LIST) for first year undergraduates, involving animations and other e-learning techniques. Even though the LIST tutorial is based on Australian law, the general principles are the same and would, therefore, not affect the evaluation – it is the design that is important not the actual content.

The main reason for choosing the LIST course was due to the rationale behind its construction. LIST was developed in 2002 to utilise new technologies and to meet the ever-changing requirements of the student population. The University of Melbourne discovered that participation in voluntary sessions were dwindling and students were indicating that they wanted to be able to learn more about legal research anywhere, anytime with more hands-on experience. Like SOAS, the University has a diverse student population with a number of international students. They also experience the same problems of different languages and cultures creating a difficult and frustrating learning environment. This is very similar to the current position SOAS finds itself in and by evaluating this tutorial, it provides an opportunity to see how another academic institution tackles the same problems.

3.2.3 Construction of the Evaluation Policy

Whilst researching, it was discovered that any evaluation of online legal research skills training courses have involved questionnaires and direct observation of students working through the course. These gained mostly student feedback and helped to see the effectiveness of the course as a whole. This project aims to look further – at how universities have used tools within the VLE to create the course. This goes beyond just requiring student feedback to looking at the design and structure of the course and the technology used. Therefore, in the absence of any standard current policy evaluating online legal research skills courses one needed to be constructed. To create an evaluation policy for this purpose, the experiences of universities evaluating their own courses were taken into consideration, as were evaluations of VLEs in general.

Firstly, it was necessary to decide what, in particular, needed to be evaluated. It was important to see whether the e-learning tool is used to its full advantage in delivering legal skills training. Are all possible technological features of the VLE employed? Another significant aspect is to see the impact the course has on learning, teaching and research - how the online course effects the development of legal research skills

and whether it can teach legal research skills effectively. Finally, the satisfaction the students have after working through the course should be considered. How do they perceive the tool and does it meet their needs?

Therefore, the following themes, and the issues surrounding them, were considered when constructing the policy:

- (a) E-learning tool
- (b) Satisfaction of the users
- (c) Impact on the users

In order to construct a policy with these topics in mind, it was necessary to examine previous research into evaluating e-learning and to analyse the development process and evaluation techniques used by institutions implementing an online legal research skills tutorial.

(a) E-learning tool

Crawley (1999) in his examination of evaluation criteria for Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning looked at the technical requirements of the VLE - its features, user-friendliness, speed and stability of the system. Likewise, Piccoli et al (2001) when investigating the effectiveness of basic IT skills training decided to evaluate the design dimensions of the training tool - looking at its technological quality, reliability and availability.

One of the key features of a VLE is its interactivity. As Britain & Liber (1999) states "it is not enough for material to be presented to a student and then be tested on it" (p.15), there needs to be some degree of interactivity. This can involve the use of quizzes, self-tests, animations, simulations or even discussion boards. The course should allow the students to become actively involved throughout the tutorial in any way the VLE can allow. Following on from this, Dewald (1999) described the use of graphics within an online course in order to see whether they enhance the learning experience or obstruct it. He looked specifically at whether a tutorial had few or no graphics or were graphic intensive.

Dewald (1999) also looked at the navigational aids throughout the tutorial (e.g. the buttons, icons or Table of Contents) – which are mainly used so that students can choose which lessons to follow and in what order. However, are they easy to find? Do

the students feel lost? Likewise, Crawley (1999) also looked at the interface of the VLE, stating that the navigation should be simple and intuitive.

In a more practical setting, Smith McLaurin & Presser (2004) describe the process used during the pre-implementation test stage of the LIST course. Faculty librarians and a number of law students were invited to work through the LIST prototype and test all aspects including the design, ease of use, stability of the tutorial and the quality of the graphical elements.

Therefore, the policy should consider the following points:

- Technological aspects, including,
 - VLE platform (design and stability)
 - Accessibility
 - Reliability
 - Navigational aids
 - Graphics
 - Interactivity

(b) Satisfaction of users

Piccoli et al (2001) states that “satisfaction has been a widely used parameter to evaluate the effectiveness of learning environments in an academic setting”. However, there has been little research into evaluating the satisfaction of users using an online legal research skills training programme, therefore, personal experience and those of other institutions shall be used in order to construct this section of the evaluation policy.

One of the main areas is to look at whether the course meets the students learning needs. In other words are they learning all they need to? This can be measured by examining the learning outcomes of the course, or the aims and objectives and looking at whether these are being met throughout the course. Likewise, Manchester Metropolitan University in their evaluation of the PoLeR course looked at whether the tutorials covered all that was needed to complete the quizzes. Did the course provide students with all the information to attempt the assessments? (Harradine, 2001)

Following on from this, another area that needs to be looked at is the content. Although, it is mainly the design of the course that needs to be evaluated there are certain aspects of legal research that need to be covered to ensure the student receives

complete and thorough skills training. For example, are all aspects of teaching legal research skills covered? Does the course cover how to find primary materials (case law and legislation) and secondary materials (journal articles)? Likewise, it is important to note whether the course describes just online resources. Students should learn how to use both paper and electronic formats, as the project executive for the College of Law VLE admitted, “in the real world, access to electronic copies will not always be so easy...the materials used by the lawyers will remain a mix of the two” (Barber, 2004). Thus, students should be taught how to use both print and online resources. However, this is not the case at SOAS where students only receive one hour sessions on electronic databases. It was found to be too difficult to arrange sessions on paper resources – especially when it involved looking at the vast number of print materials available for each region and each country. If an online course covers some of these print resources, students should become familiar with them and perhaps it will enable them to be more confident in using paper sources within the library. Therefore, it is important to see whether the course incorporates printed resources as well as online and if so, how do they present them to the student?

It is also important to ensure that students are being tested on their knowledge throughout the course. After all, “skill activities need to be validly and reliably assessed and appropriately valued in the assessment scheme to motivate students to learn” (Wolski, 2002:293). Therefore, there must be some form of assessment throughout the course which can test the students’ knowledge. For example, the University of Melbourne designed their quizzes in LIST to specifically test the students knowledge according to the programs overall learning objectives (Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004). Feedback is also essential as it not only indicates a right or wrong answer but can help a students understanding of the subject. Therefore, when students complete a quiz, there must be instant and appropriate feedback.

Finally, The Manchester Metropolitan University’s experience when evaluating their own VLE course PoLeR highlights specific questions that can also be looked at. Students working through the PoLeR tutorial were surveyed using a straightforward evaluation form in order to get quick and simple feedback. The form asked, among others, the following questions:

- Was structure logical?
- Were tutorials easy to follow?
- Did self-tests reinforce tutorials?
- How difficult the quizzes were?

- Was it helpful to study at their own convenience?
- Did they print out tutorial notes?
- Was there sufficient help available? (Harradine, 2001)

These questions help measure the satisfaction students' have after working through the course and indicates how they perceived it - whether they found it difficult, useful or confusing.

Therefore, the policy should consider the following points:

- Aims, objectives or learning outcomes
- Content – what is being taught?
- Language used
- Structure of the text
- Flow of the tutorial – was it confusing or difficult to follow?
- Use of quizzes or self tests
- Feedback from quizzes or self tests

(c) Impact on users

As Clinch (1999) points out there are a number of ways to evaluate the impact skills training has on students – by direct or indirect means. Student feedback can be sought directly by administering a questionnaire after the completion of the course or initiating a group discussion amongst students. However, the comments received from students themselves can only indicate how they regard the course. Using indirect means of evaluation is a better way of investigating how the course has effected the students' development of legal research skills.

Students can be observed using the course and their non-verbal behaviour during the training can be noted. By looking at a students' engagement with the course it will shed light on its impact. For instance, do students read all the text? Are they interested in completing quizzes? The University of Melbourne use this approach to evaluate the LIST course, where librarians directly observe students working through the tutorial and monitor their level of engagement, progress though LIST and any problem areas (Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004).

On the other hand, to evaluate the effectiveness of LIST, the University of Melbourne looked at the success rates of the quizzes and evaluating student performance in the

exercises. Thus, it is also possible to look at the assessment results of quizzes and assignments and compare them with previous results when training was delivered in a face-to-face environment. Clinch (1999) discusses the purposes of assessment where it is to:

“Provide feedback to us on how well we have taught. We can learn whether we have successfully explained concepts, given students’ sufficient opportunities to develop and practice skills, and so on. If we knew which parts of the subject students find difficult, we can revise our teaching, to improve student learning”.

Thus, by evaluating the overall student performance in certain exercises it is possible to gain a better understanding of how effective the training is in terms of teaching and helping to develop legal research skills.

Therefore, the policy should consider the following points:

- Students engagement with the tutorial
- Improved research skills
- Effectiveness in terms of objectives or learning outcomes

Using the areas discussed above, the final evaluation policy (see Appendix I below) was created. A basic grid structure was used with yes or no columns, along with straightforward questions to provide quick and simple feedback.

3.3 Questionnaire

It was necessary to get some background information on SOAS students to understand what they specifically need from legal research skills training. It was important to see how students perceive current training sessions and legal research skills in general, for example, what aspects of the training do they put into practice? How successful is the current skills training and what do SOAS students need to help them develop these skills?

A questionnaire was developed to help provide the answers. It was delivered to all law students studying at SOAS at the time. This was the most convenient way to collect this type of data as it could be distributed in a variety of formats and, with the

assistance of various contacts within SOAS, could ensure a relatively high response rate.

3.3.1 Design of Questionnaire

Similar questionnaires examining legal research skills training were researched to get a better idea of how to construct one for SOAS students. The experiences of the institutions distributing them were noted and the questions were adapted. The final design of the questionnaire was based on one developed at the University of Oxford in particular, for a similar research project (see Appendix II below). Most of the questions were taken from this questionnaire as it had already been used in another academic setting and their experiences have shown it can collect effective data. However, slight changes were made to accommodate the nature of law studied at SOAS.

When constructing a questionnaire, there is an obvious need to ensure there is a logical flow – each question must follow on from the other to make students understand what is being asked of them. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions were used to collect both numeric data and more detailed data on students' views and opinions on legal research skills training. This resulted in the formulation of open ended and closed questions. Open-ended questions enabled students to give their own views on the topic. Closed questions such as multiple choice, provided complete set of response alternatives but the student also had the opportunity to add further detail.

As the questionnaire is aimed at international students, it was important to remember to make the questions and responses clear. There should be no jargon and only simple clear language should be used, to avoid any misunderstandings. Further to this, a brief introduction was given at the beginning of the questionnaire to show how important it was for the students to complete and return it and encouraged students to do so to help improve future skills training.

The first band of questions was designed to be simple and straightforward - the objective was to ascertain what type of student they were as this would affect the results of the answers to the questions that followed. It was assumed that postgraduate students have already attended legal research skills training and should, therefore, be using more databases than undergraduates, or at least be more familiar with them.

The second band of questions related to whether they actually attended a legal research skills session and whether they used or were even aware of particular resources. It provided mostly quantitative data – using structured closed questions and looked at the link between attending legal research skills training and the use of legal databases. After learning about these databases and how to search for information – do students actually go on to use them?

The third section provided a set of statements that students were able to agree or disagree with – with responses ranging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. These questions were an easy way to collect qualitative data and helped to indicate how students feel about particular situations and aspects of legal research.

Finally, students were given an opportunity to provide comments on how they regard legal research skills training and using legal databases – in particular looking at any factors that affect their usage of legal databases.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix III below) was delivered initially in paper format only and placed at the Enquiry and Issue desk within the SOAS library. Members of library staff were encouraged to distribute it to any law students they dealt with. An email was then sent to all law students at their SOAS email address, with the questionnaire added as an attachment and embedded within the main text. This was to ensure all students were able to view the questionnaire and return it easily. A reminder email was sent at a later date encouraging students to complete it and warning them that it was their last chance to do so. Finally, to ensure all students had access to the questionnaire in a variety of formats, it was placed on the VLE under the relevant law courses with permission from the course conveners. Support from the lecturers and the fact that it was more anonymous than email, helped encourage the students to complete and return it.

However, as response rates from these delivery methods were still very low a final attempt to promote the questionnaire was made. One academic granted permission to attend one of the final lectures the undergraduate students were given before the examination period. The questionnaire was distributed at the end of the session and completed ones were collected from the students as they left. This approach was quite successful as it had the support of the lecturer and students had to fill out the questionnaire there and then.

3.4 Limitations and problems

One immediate limitation to the evaluation policy is that it does not incorporate direct observation. Observation studies can provide important data about how people reaction certain situations, to see “whether people do what they say they do, or behave on the way they claim to behave” (Bell, 1999:156). On the other hand, interviewing students after they have completed the tutorials might not provide accurate information. As Nisbet & Watt (1980) point out, interviews only reveal “how people perceive what happens, not what actually happens” (in Bell, 1999).

For this project, organising a group of students to work through the chosen tutorials and observing their reactions would have been ideal to gain useful and relevant information. According to Bell (1999), observation “may be more reliable than what people say in many instances” (p.156). Such a study, therefore, would provide invaluable qualitative data on how a student would approach a tutorial on Legal Research Skills Training.

An observation study was considered at the start of this research project. The intention was to organize a focus group consisting of undergraduate students and to examine their progress through each VLE and tutorial. How would a student with no previous training in legal research, and with English as a second language, cope with the technological aspects of the VLE? What would they find most difficult? How would they find the interactive features of each tutorial? Will it better help their development of legal research skills? These questions can only be ascertained by observing the students whilst using the VLE and their progress through each tutorial.

Unfortunately, it was incredibly difficult and time-consuming to arrange such a study. Observation involves a lot of co-operation and organisation - as Bell (1999) points out, they are “not an easy option”. Access to the VLEs was limited – LIST was only available for two specific weeks – so asking students to complete the tutorials in such a short space of time was unreasonable. At the time most students were preparing for the examination period and were reluctant to participate when it involved their own free time. Further, both tutorials are a complete module in their own right and it would have been very time-consuming for the students to complete – taking more time then they were able to provide. A way around this would be to consider organising a focus group with work colleagues and friends. However, due to various work commitments especially with the two week time constraint, this was not possible.

Another reason for not using this particular research method was the fact that when it came to observe students interacting with the tutorials, they would have already attended face-to-face skills training sessions and would, therefore, already have the relevant skills. This would make evaluating the tools effectiveness at teaching such skills difficult. It would not be possible to replicate the real scenario of students seeing the tutorial and learning the relevant skills for the first time. It would also be impossible to gauge accurate results as the students would have completed one tutorial before they started the other – therefore, influencing the final results.

Despite the value of such observation studies, student feedback from the institutions themselves was deemed to be sufficient. Although not ideal, the institutions own evaluation of their tutorials were useful and helped validate this research. At the University of Melbourne (as mentioned above), librarians directly observe students working through the tutorial and monitor their level of engagement, progress through LIST and any problem areas (Smith McLaurin & Presser, 2004). This provides useful feedback to see whether the tutorial needs to be altered or enhanced. Unfortunately, full feedback from both Institutions was unavailable. In light of this, it was decided to rely on the feedback published in academic journals.

Further to this, the fact that only two VLEs were evaluated poses certain problems – in that the research is quite narrow. A wide range of VLEs offering legal research skills training could have been looked at making the research more rounded and providing a better understanding of how best to teach legal research skills online. However, it was felt that these two online courses were sufficient as this project is looking at undergraduate legal research skills only and the two VLEs have made a significant contribution to this area.

A number of problems were encountered during the design of the questionnaire. Firstly, it was quite time-consuming and difficult to construct clear and meaningful questions. As respondents were mostly students with English as a second language, it was important to make sure all the questions were unambiguous and used clear language. Otherwise, students might not have understood the questions and this could have lead to misleading results and a poor response rate. Secondly, an essential question of whether English is their first or second language was omitted and was only discovered after the questionnaire was distributed. This would have provided a vital piece of information. The object of the study is to produce a framework for SOAS students and the fact that English is not their first language will impact on how they learn, and what they might need in order to learn successfully.

The question of how exact the results are also arises. There is a problem that students might just be completing the questionnaire to get it done, rather than to be helpful. Further, most of the students who commented had very strong opinions and the views of the “average” student have been excluded. This can lead to misleading results and inaccurate data. It might also be unreasonable to expect a student to know or even remember how often they use a particular database. It is useful to consider when looking at the results that the answers may not be accurate or even truthful.

As was expected, there was a very slow response to the questionnaire. One factor influencing this could be the fact that no time limit was given to complete it. The reason for not giving a deadline was that it would give the opportunity for everyone to contribute. However, not many students did and this could be due to the fact that there was no urgency associated with it – students were not made aware how important it was to complete and return. As Bell (1999) states, “if no date is specified...it becomes too easy for subjects to put the questionnaire to one side, which often means that it will never be seen again.”(p.129). Further to this, the questionnaire was distributed during the examination period. This could account for the poor response from students who were too busy revising for exams or finishing coursework.

Another contributing factor could be the fact that students were not given any incentive to complete the questionnaire. A prize (such as gift vouchers) could have been offered to interest more students. They might have been more willing to complete the questionnaire if they felt they had a chance of winning a prize.

Lastly, to ensure complete and thorough research was undertaken, follow-up interviews could have been organized with those students who wished to help. These would have produced more useful and accurate qualitative data. However, by the time the questionnaires were returned. Students were either sitting exams or returning home for the summer holiday and were therefore, unwilling to cooperate.

Despite these problems and limitations it was felt that the results gained will be able to inform and help create a useful framework for delivering an online legal research skills training course for SOAS students. It has also highlighted the need for further research and can help enlighten future investigations into this area.

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire

To understand the delivery of legal research skills training at SOAS as a whole it was decided to look at both postgraduate and undergraduate results – although the focus will be on undergraduate students. It was important to get an overall view of how skills' training is being perceived by students in general and whether they are using those skills in practice - regardless of where they are in their studies.

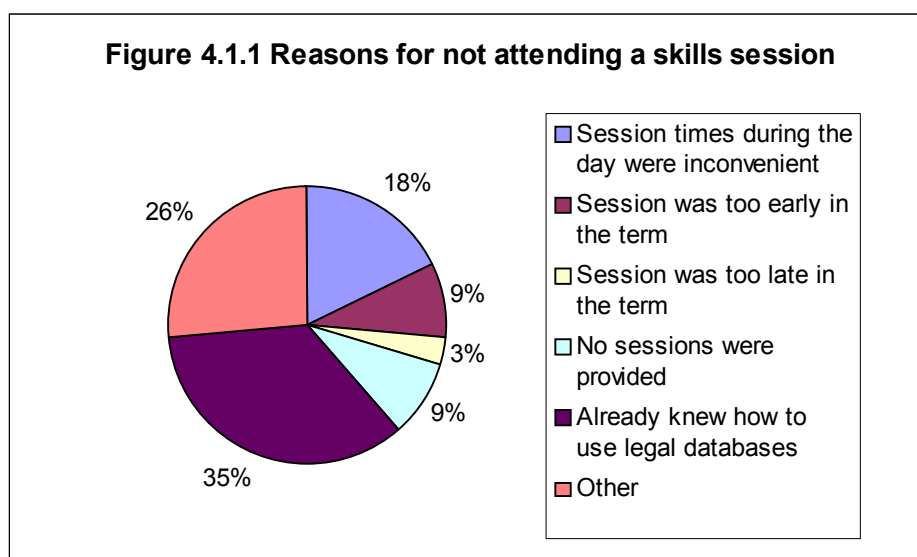
There was a reasonable response to the questionnaire with 79% of all law students replying and 85% of those being undergraduates. Considering there are only 386 law students in total and the questionnaire was delivered during the examination period, this is a reasonable proportion of students.

Of those who did reply to the questionnaire, it is clear that students recognise the importance of legal research skills training with 87% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing to the statement that they do not need to know how to do legal research in databases until/if they become a trainee lawyer. Students are aware that they need to develop these skills during their studies, yet are reluctant to attend skills sessions. The results show that there is, generally, poor attendance at skills sessions, with only 65% of undergraduate students actually attending sessions run by the law librarian. This shows that there are many students currently studying who do not have the relevant skills to research correctly and this puts them at a disadvantage when attempting coursework. Likewise, only 42% of postgraduates attended sessions. Even though these students are supposed to have already received training by the time they start their courses, the fact that there is a low attendance at the undergraduate level suggests that there may be some postgraduate students who do not receive **any** formal legal research training throughout their time at SOAS.

One of the main reasons given for not attending skills training (see Figure 4.1.1) is that students believed they already knew how to use the databases (35%). One undergraduate student who did not attend the sessions for this reason pointed out that “by the time [skills training] was offered most students had already had to read cases and they had to muddle along.” This suggests that although students believe they already know how to use the databases, they probably do not know how to use them effectively or efficiently. This raises the question of how to ensure students attend the

training sessions if they believe they already know everything. One answer to this is to ensure the training is compulsory – to embed the sessions within the law course as discussed above. This also suggests that any future skills training should be timelier – with 12% of students agreeing that sessions were either too late in the term or too early. One undergraduate student in their final year points out that as they are “a very lazy student, [they do] not work through the course and leave research etc. to the last moment – assignment deadlines and exam.” Perhaps skills training would be more beneficial to this student at these times – when they need it the most at assignment deadlines and examination periods.

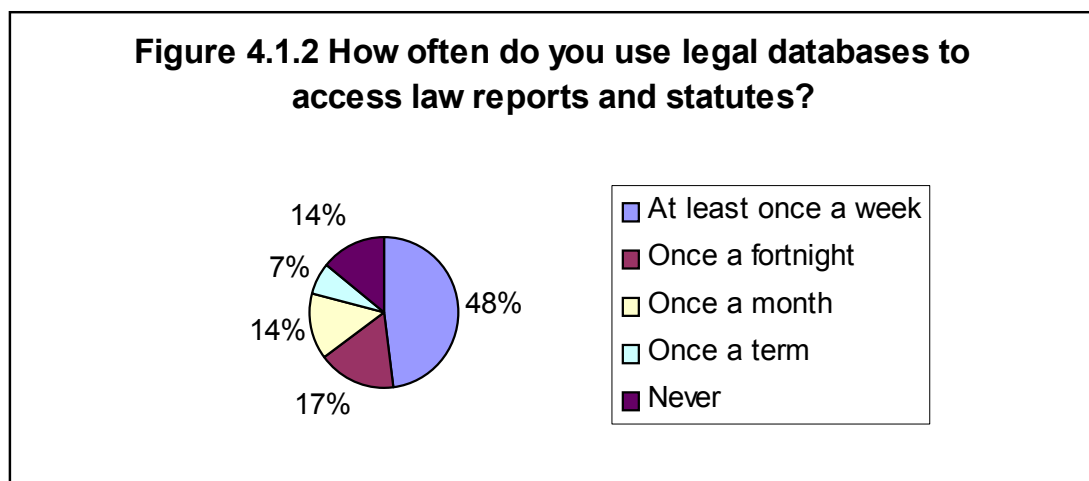
Further to this, a proportion of the students also felt that the timings of the sessions during the day were inconvenient (18%). This could be due to the fact that they had other work or study commitments and were unable to attend the allotted times and highlights the need for a more flexible approach to the timing of such sessions.



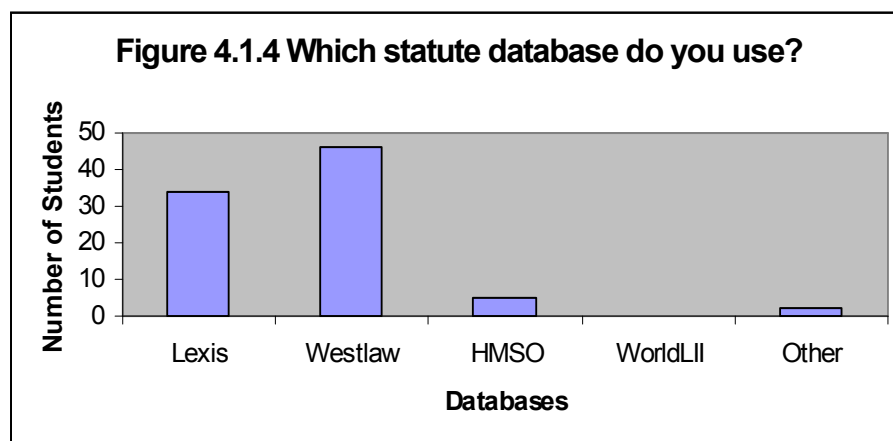
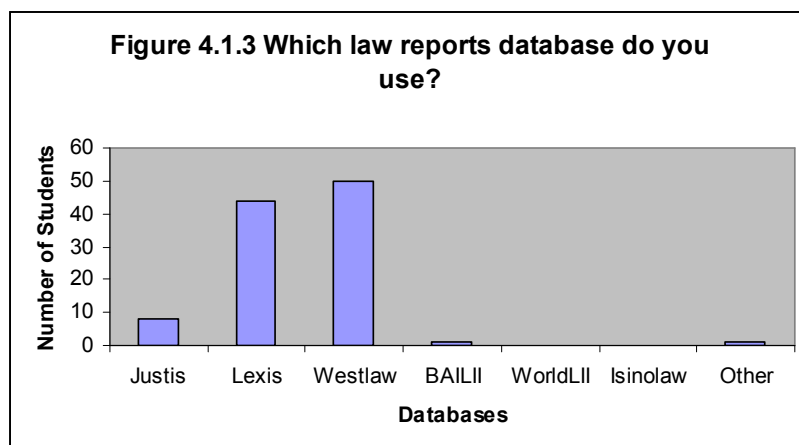
Most students did not attend skills sessions for a variety of other reasons (26%) not specifically mentioned in the questionnaire. One undergraduate student went so far as to say that the sessions were inconvenient and that he just “couldn’t be bothered” to turn up! Likewise, another undergraduate student “signed up for one but just couldn’t get round to it”. This sums up the general attitude of undergraduates as a whole - if they don’t believe it will be beneficial they will not attend. One way around this is to get academics to lend their weight to the training. If they can categorically state from the very beginning of the course that attending sessions are essential for their law degree – students might be more enthusiastic about attending.

Ultimately, these results show that any online course for SOAS students needs to appeal to laziness and time constraints. This is where the use of a VLE can be beneficial – online skills sessions can be self-paced and timelier. If there is an online skills training course, students might be more willing to look at it as they can access it at anytime, anywhere, rather than having to attend a lecture at a specified time.

The results also indicate that students recognise that they need to use online resources as well as other resources to access legal information. 86% of students disagreed or disagreed strongly to the statement that they do not need to use the databases because nearly everything is in the textbooks. Students are aware that not all legal material is available in print form in the library and they will, in fact, need to learn how to use databases. Indeed, students use databases to access case law and legislation regularly - with the majority of students accessing them weekly and fortnightly (see Figure 4.1.2).



These figures are encouraging as it shows that students are aware of the importance of finding and using primary materials. However, the results also indicate that, even after attending sessions, students only use two main databases to access these materials (Lexis and Westlaw), despite having a number of other resources available to them (see Figures 4.1.3 and 4.1.4).

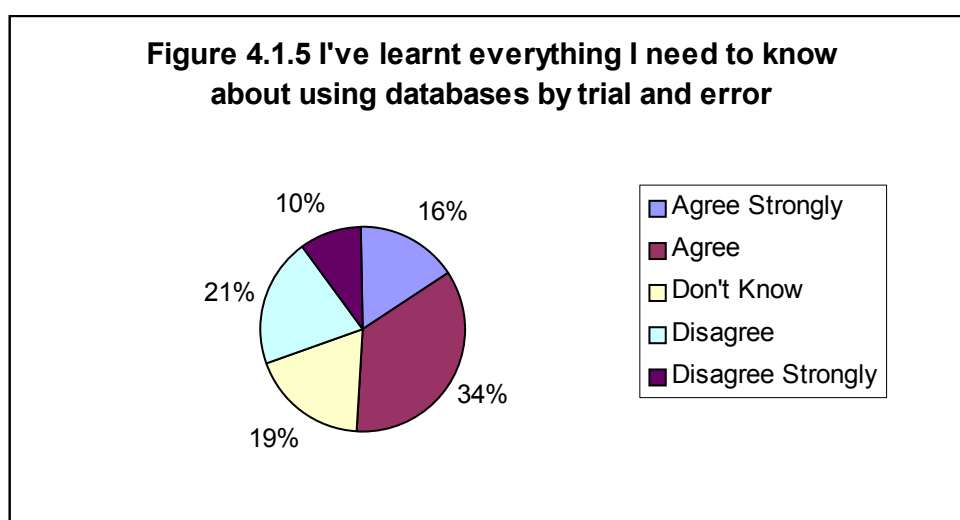


Currently, during the skills sessions' students are made aware of the existence of various online resources and are given handouts on the content of each resource. Although due to time constraints, students are shown how to use just a few of these resources. It is very difficult to convey the importance of using different resources – that some material may be found in one database but not another. It is also very difficult to go through the vast array of resources available for specific regions during the allocated time. It is clear that students are not able to take on board all the information given to them during the session and it is obvious from the results that they only use the databases that have been presented to them in detail and never, if at all, use other databases or even free websites that have only been mentioned.

Further to this, it is clear that students do not use other journal databases to access secondary materials. Students seem to use the two main databases (Westlaw and Lexis) to access legal journal articles, with 56% of all students accessing these weekly or fortnightly. However, as these contain only the legal journals published by these companies and are mainly UK and EU based, they exclude other general international publications. Students are made aware of the existence of other general journal databases during their skills training, but they do not seem to access these. For instance, 53% of students said they did not access these databases at all! This

indicates that students are not aware of the fact that other non-legal materials might be useful to their research, or that there are other resources available containing international secondary materials.

Most students agreed that they have learnt how to use legal databases by trial and error (see Figure 4.1.4). This was the case even for those students who had attended a skills session, with 54% of them agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement that they learnt how to use the databases through trial and error. This shows that students are more comfortable learning how to use databases through practise and that the lack of any hands-on exercises during the sessions does not help the students to develop relevant and useful skills. However, by learning in this way, it does not mean that students know how to search effectively or efficiently. Students should be given more opportunity to practice using the databases during skills sessions so that they receive suitable instruction and appropriate feedback as to whether they are using them correctly.



These results suggest, therefore, that any online course for SOAS students needs to encourage them to use a variety of resources and should promote all available resources including any free websites. Detailed training for certain databases should also be provided to ensure that SOAS students are familiar and confident in searching all available resources. An element of practical training should also be incorporated to ensure students learn how to search the resources effectively and efficiently.

There seems to be some reluctance from students to use resources that are not either subscribed to by the library or shown how to use in detail. As shown in Figures 4.1.3 and 4.1.4 above, students are unlikely to use selected free legal websites such as BAILII (an official website providing access to UK cases and legislation). They seem

more willing to use a general search engine such as Google. The results show that students often rely on the internet to find materials on their reading lists, with 60% of students using search engines weekly or fortnightly. However, students may not be aware of the dangers of just using Google to find legal materials. Not all online websites should be trusted – especially when it concerns different regional law. Further, students may be searching correctly or effectively as they may not be aware of the best search strategy to find particular information.

Likewise, some comments made by students regarding legal research skills in general have highlighted certain areas of concern. An undergraduate student admitted that they are “often unsure of where to look for articles that are not on my reading list i.e. which journals I should look in, where to search for articles that might be relevant.” This student even attended a training session, but they still have not developed the very basic skills. This is not an isolated case as even a third year undergraduate student, coming to the end of their studies, declared that they “really don't know how to get journals from the legal databases...I have tried a lot on my own but been unsuccessful.” This student did not attend any skills sessions, nor did they approach the law librarian for help – thus, reinforcing the view made above that students are lazy and despite needing assistance will not attend training sessions.

Further to this, a postgraduate student who attended skills training throughout their course states that they are “useless with researching on computers”. This student confesses that in order to get information online, they “make photocopies of my friends and give them my copies of books!” From personal experience, this is not an isolated view and suggests that SOAS students, in particular those from a developing country, will usually have limited IT skills. As mentioned in section 1.3 above, students who have experience with technology will be more likely to use a VLE and will be comfortable completing online exercises and accessing instructional materials within it. On the other hand, students with basic IT skills will be more restrained and will be reluctant to use an online skills training course. For this reason, it is important to make SOAS tutorials very basic and should perhaps include certain IT skills.

Therefore, the results discussed above suggest that an online course should include training in not only legal research skills but generic skills – how best to search the internet and how to plan a search strategy. The course should also incorporate elements of basic IT training, for those who have none or little previous computer experience.

To combat the problem described above regarding students' reluctance to use free websites, an online subject guide was created by the law librarian at SOAS, which identifies free legal websites relevant to students' research. It is important to encourage students to use free legal websites as they may not be able to rely on subscription databases once in legal practice. This gateway provides links to selected useful websites; however, the majority of all students never use it. Even though it is shown during the skills session, students still seem to be unaware of its existence with 37% of those attending skills session admitting they have never used it. Therefore, an online course needs to be able to show students how to use free legal websites as well as those subscribed to by the library. Perhaps the use of an online course will help promote the subject guide and reinforce the fact that there are a variety of legal resources available online.

In summary, the key areas that have been highlighted by the questionnaire results are provided below. Any online course delivering legal research skills training to SOAS students should:

- Provide timely sessions – allowing students to access skills training when they need it most and allowing students to work through the training in their own time and at their own pace.
- Appeal to laziness – providing students with more interactive sessions.
- Promote all available resources - providing detailed training in a wider variety of online resources such as databases, websites and online law subject guide as well as printed resources.
- Provide more hands-on practical training.
- Provide training in more generic skills such as how to construct a search strategy.
- Be basic and clear to accommodate students with little IT skills or with English as a second language.

Therefore, the objective, as stated in 1.2 above, to investigate the needs of SOAS students in terms of legal skills training has been met.

4.2 Evaluation

The two courses, LIST and InfoSkills, were evaluated according to the criteria laid out in the evaluation policy discussed in section 3.2 above. The results from this evaluation were analysed and are examined below:

4.2.1 Technological Aspects

Both VLEs required a username and password to access this makes it easy to access and more personal to the user. There were no technological problems to restrict access as both platforms were reliable.

Both courses provide clear and simple instructions on how to navigate through the VLEs. The Infoskills homepage (see Figures 4.2.1.a below) lay out each section clearly and includes a separate section on how to move around the tutorial providing definitions of the various icons used (see Figure 4.2.1.b). The course also includes a “where was I?” button to take the student to the last page viewed. This is useful when students are going through the tutorial at their own pace and due to time constraints need to leave the training - they can then return to the last section they viewed. This helps aid learning and ensures students do not get lost within the tutorial.

Figure 4.2.1.a: Screenshot of InfoSkills Homepage

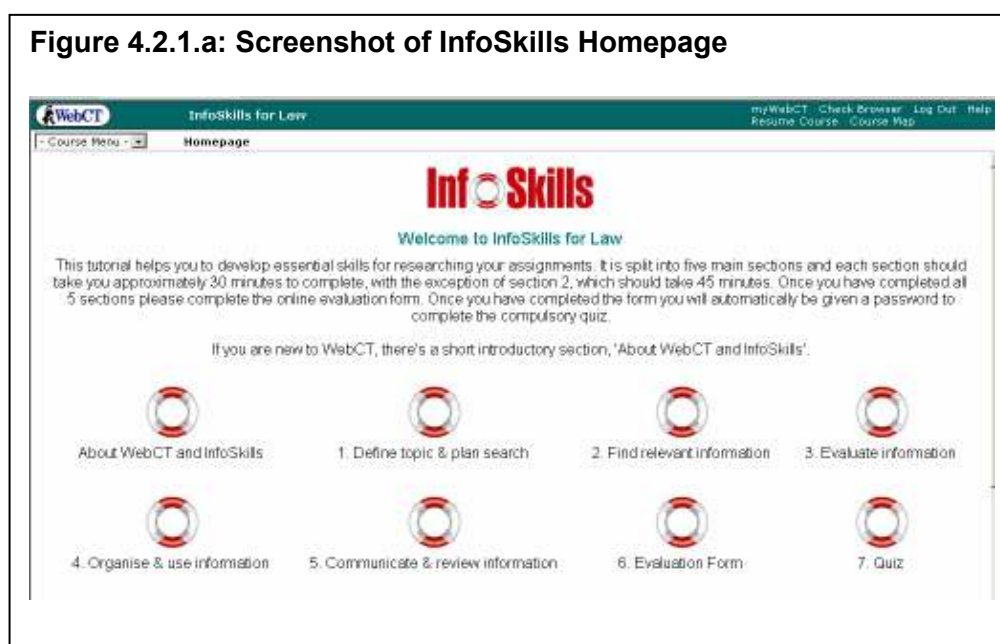
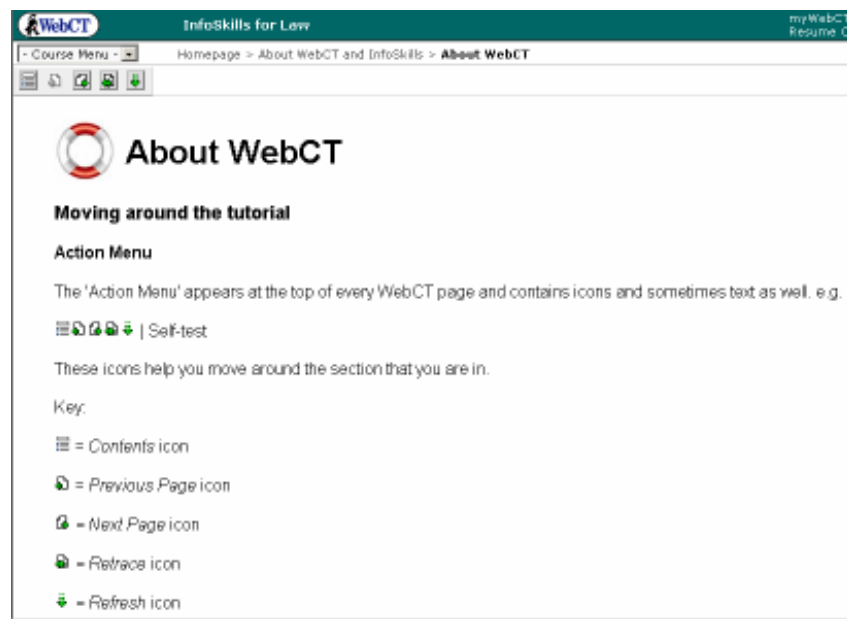


Figure 4.2.1.b: Screenshot of InfoSkills - About WebCT page



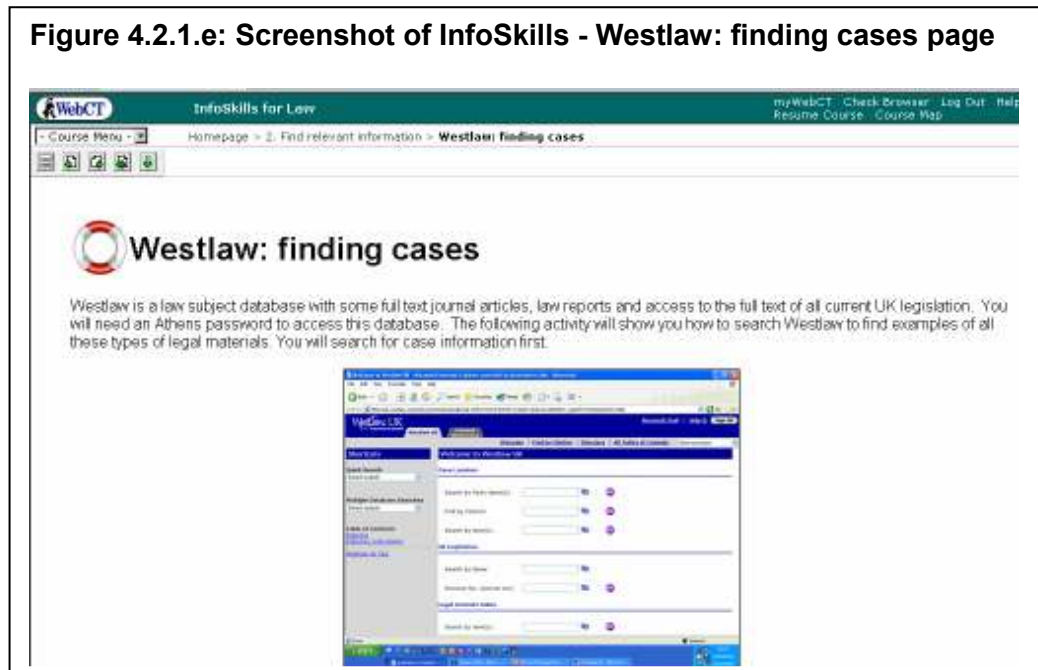
On the other hand, LIST did not provide any instructions on how to navigate the tutorial, instead simple and well highlighted pointers to the next or previous page are used, together with a table of contents permanently located on the left side of the page (see Figures 4.2.1.c). This is a quicker way of navigating through the tutorial and is, perhaps, easier to use for those students with little IT skills.

Figure 4.2.1.c: Screenshot of LIST homepage



particular database aside from what the front screen looks like. Other screenshots provide a small glimpse into the databases but again only show a variation of the front screen or a sample of the search conducted.

Figure 4.2.1.e: Screenshot of InfoSkills - Westlaw: finding cases page



Alternatively, the LIST programme has few straightforward or plain images as the InfoSkills programme does, and uses mostly interactive tools instead. The LIST programme provides animations, quizzes and exercises to explain certain instructions and resources rather than just simple pictures or graphics. For instance, even the diagrams explaining Boolean logic are animated where the certain areas targeted by the particular Boolean search are made to flash. These interactive tools are discussed at length below.

It is clear that both of these programmes display instructional material in a variety of ways. This helps those students who prefer to learn in a more visual way with images rather than just reading text. By using humorous graphics and eye-catching images, students are provided with more interesting ways in which to learn legal research skills. Such graphics should also enhance the learning experience by not only displaying the relevant resources, but also helping to explain particular points of legal research. Therefore, any online course needs to have a sufficient amount of images, graphics or diagrams to help support the teaching of legal research skills.

Both programmes utilise the interactive tools available within each course, thereby allowing students to become more actively involved. As mentioned above, quizzes can

be very useful as it provides students with the opportunity to check their own understanding and level of legal research skills. However, the InfoSkills programme only provides quizzes in a multiple choice format, whereas the LIST programme allows for a variety of different forms (discussed below). The InfoSkills tutorial does not provide any interactive tutorials or animations on how to use certain resources; rather, it provides a simple online guide to the databases and various activities (see Figure 4.2.1.f) and quizzes (see Figure 4.2.1.g) that ensure the student practices using them. Throughout the course, numerous quizzes are made available that ask students to perform certain exercises within a resource and then answer specific multiple choice questions. This is another way of teaching a student how to use the resources, and relies more on student participation and the fact that they actually practice using the databases means there is more active learning. However, there are a few disadvantages to providing training in this way. The InfoSkills programme requires the student to access the databases live - meaning that the student needs to open up a separate internet session and flick between the VLE course and the database. The programme does not provide simulations like LIST, where the student can follow an exercise directly within the database and can work through the instructions within the VLE, nor does it provide a split screen where the student can look at the database within the VLE. Instead, the student will need to move between the VLE course and the database. This can be frustrating when having to read the next instruction, and can be difficult for those with limited IT skills.

Figure 4.2.1.f: Screenshot of InfoSkills – Westlaw: finding cases

The screenshot shows the 'InfoSkills for Law' interface with a search for 'Campbell v Mirror Group Newspapers'. The page includes a navigation bar, a search bar, and a list of search results. The first result is highlighted, and the text on the right side of the screen provides instructions on how to find full text on Westlaw.

There may be more than one result for a case name search as there can be more than one hearing of a case, i.e., a case appeal or an additional hearing in the European courts. There will also be additional cases listed if a case has been overruled.

Activity 5

1. Search for '**Campbell v Mirror Group Newspapers**'.
2. Select the second result from the list displayed down left side of the screen by clicking on the item number.

The text now displayed on the right of the screen has a red flag showing at the top of the page. A red flag indicates that a case has been reversed or overruled. Click on the red flag to find further details of a case's status.

- When you view select a case from the short results list on the left of the screen, further details of the case will be shown on the right side of the screen.
- The case information includes: references to full text case reports; a summary of the case and the full history of a case.
- Westlaw is updated 3 times a day so even very recent developments are included.
- Details of legislation cited during the case, plus a list of journal articles, with full references, written about the case, are also included in the further details summary.

Finding full text on Westlaw

Occasionally, full text law reports or articles are available on Westlaw. Any reference written in blue and underlined is a hyper-link to the full text of the item. Clicking on the link will display a second box which contains the full text. The report or article can be printed, downloaded or e-mailed by clicking on 'Print Doc' at the bottom of the screen and following the instructions.

Figure 4.2.1.g: Screenshot of InfoSkills – Westlaw: finding legislation

The screenshot shows the 'InfoSkills for Law' web interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'WebCT', 'InfoSkills for Law', and user options like 'myWebCT', 'Check Browser', 'Log Out', and 'Help'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'Homepage > 2. Find relevant information > Westlaw: finding legislation'. The main content area is titled 'Searching for legislation covering specific topics'. It includes a paragraph explaining that to find acts on a specific topic, one must select 'UK Legislation' from the shortcuts list. Below this is 'Activity 9' with four numbered steps: 1. Return to the 'Westlaw' front page by clicking 'Welcome' on the menu bar. 2. Underneath the heading 'Shortcuts' on the left hand side of the screen, open the drop-down menu under the title 'Quick Search'. 3. Select 'UK Legislation'. 4. From this screen you can enter keywords to find acts covering specific topics. A text box prompts the user to enter 'dangerous dogs' in the 'Term(s)' box. Below this, a question asks which of the following acts is not listed in the first page of results for 'dangerous dogs?'. The options are: ☐ Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, ☐ Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, ☐ Courts Act 2003, and ☒ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. A green box on the right states: 'Correct answer! The Police and Criminal Evidence Act does not cover laws about dangerous dogs.' At the bottom, there's a note to click on the 'Print Doc' icon at the bottom of the screen and follow the instructions. A footer bar says: 'Please click on the next page icon in the action menu to carry on to 'Westlaw: finding journal articles'.'

On the other hand, the LIST programme provides numerous interactive exercises - including animations and quizzes. For instance, the programme includes exercises where the student can click and drag keywords into place (see Figures 4.2.1.h and 4.2.1.i). This would be a good feature to use in an online course for SOAS students as the questionnaire results show, students can be quite lazy and apathetic. It would be more useful to combine different forms of quizzes throughout the course to provide more variety for the students and this, in turn, is likely to be more engaging for the student and encourages them to complete the training.

Figure 4.2.1.h: Screenshot of LIST – Legal Searches Exercise

If you are getting too many results, try limiting or narrowing your search to just the title, case name, author or date fields in a database. Most databases will have a search form with different boxes labelled for each field.

Now we've looked at how to plan your searching, we'll look at some research basics.

The screenshot shows a quiz titled 'QUIZ: Legal Searches'. The question is: 'Assume you are conducting research for the question "to what extent is Australia independent of the United Kingdom?".' Below the question is a search bar with the text '([] of " [] ") and ! []'. Below the search bar are four draggable boxes: 'dependence', 'United', 'UK', and 'Kingdom'. A 'Submit' button is to the right. At the bottom right, it says 'You have 3 attempt(s) remaining'. At the bottom left, there are 'Previous' and 'Next' buttons.

Figure 4.2.1.i: Screenshot of LIST – Report Series Exercise

Who Decides What Gets Reported?

Courts may indicate whether a judgment is to be reported as a part of the process of releasing a decision. In the High Court, this is standard. Other courts will only mark certain judgments for reporting.

Please Complete The Following Simulation

QUIZ: Authorised and Unauthorised Report Series

Distinguish authorised and unauthorised report series

Authorised Report Series	Unauthorised Report Series
Commonwealth Law Reports	Australian Family Law Cases
Federal Court Reports	
Victorian Reports	
New South Wales Law Reports	

Drag all these items onto the book, then press the Submit button

Australian Law Journal Reports Federal Law Reports Australian Law Reports

Submit You have 3 attempt(s) remaining

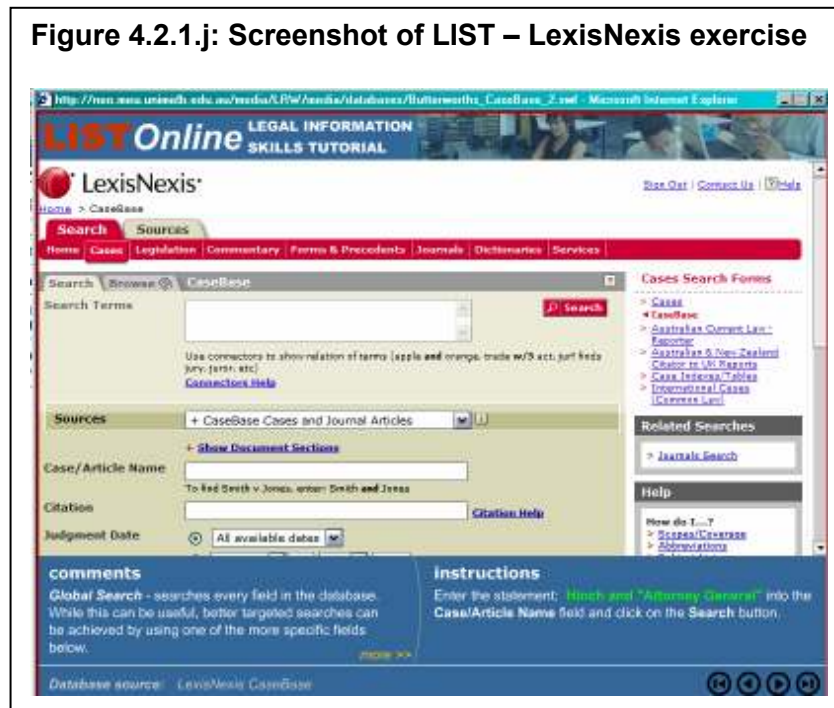
[Previous](#) [Next](#)

However, as with all non-compulsory exercises, there is no incentive for the students to actually complete these self-tests and in both courses, it is very easy for the student to ignore them. Students are able to just skip over the quizzes as they do not need to complete them to carry on with the training.

Further to the use of the VLE assessment tools, LIST provides simulations particular resources as can be seen in Figure 4.2.1.j below. These open up in separate windows and provide instructions for a particular search along with any comments and descriptions of the database. This also provides for more active learning, where students are not just shown a picture of the database but are actually able to practice using it. However, the student is only able to click on the particular search boxes and links the instructions ask them to, and unlike the InfoSkills tutorial, a student cannot browse the database. This approach means that students must follow the specific instructions and thus, stops students digressing and ignoring the exercise. In this way, students are only able to perform searches that the librarian deems appropriate and most useful for showing how to use the database. If students are allowed to go anywhere within the database, it is possible that they are more likely to start browsing and exploring the capabilities of the database using their own searches. Further, the instructions and comments within the LIST exercise could have been made clearer as it

can be confusing to know what to do when the simulation first opens. It is also likely that students ignore the comments and only focus on the instructions to complete the exercise, and do not get the full benefit of learning in this way.

Figure 4.2.1.j: Screenshot of LIST – LexisNexis exercise



Likewise, the LIST programme provides animations explaining particular issues of legal research (see Figure 4.2.1.k below). These are used to introduce each new section and add a touch of humour to the training. Animations can be very effective as it encourages students to complete the training by engaging their interest. Students becoming familiar with the characters and gives them something to identify with. They can follow their progress throughout the course learning particular areas of legal research with them.

Figure 4.2.1.k: Screenshot of LIST – Simulation of the Australian Court hierarchy



It is clear from these programmes that rather than just showing students the relevant databases, it is best to involve more interactive activities. Quizzes and exercises should be provided wherever possible to help the student check their own progress through the course. It is also important to provide these exercises in a variety of formats, to engage the student and to help them understand particular points of legal research in different ways. In addition, providing some form of online tutorial demonstrating a databases peculiarities, content and coverage alongside practical exercises where the student works through the legal resources (like the LIST simulations) is more helpful to the students then providing just large portions of text describing the databases.

In summary, it is clear from this evaluation that for an effective legal research skills training course, it is important to:

- Provide a clear guide as to how to navigate through the course.
- Add humour wherever possible to engage the students - be it in the form of graphics or animations.
- Use screenshots of resources to familiarise students with how they look and to promote little used ones (such as the law subject guide).
- Use a variety of interactive tools throughout the course to engage students, such as quizzes, exercises or other activities to help support a variety of learning styles and to provide formative feedback.
- Provide simulations in order to teach students how to use databases for more hands-on practical experience.

4.2.2 User Satisfaction

Both programmes provide clear statements of the aims and objectives of the course along with the learning outcomes for each section. The InfoSkills programme goes further in that it states the time it should take students to complete the various activities throughout the course. This helps the students to focus on the training and prepares them for how difficult the exercises are likely to be depending on how long it should take them to answer. Furthermore, the layout of both programmes is very similar and after completing each course, the content within each section appear to meet these learning outcomes.

The LIST programme is split into five different sections:

1. PLAN – where students are taught generic skills, including the basics of searching and creating a search string. This section looks at how to formulate a Boolean search and the use of key terms and concepts.
2. RESEARCH – where students are taught the different sources of legal information, with simulations going through the various databases drawing attention to key areas. Hard copy resources are also described.
3. LOCATE – where students are taught the various tools for locating information, using the University and other catalogues.
4. EVALUATE – where students are taught the more generic skill of how to assess the reliability of resources, especially web pages.
5. DOCUMENT – where students are taught about copyright, plagiarism and how to write a law essay.

Likewise, the InfoSkills programme is split into similar sections:

1. Define topic and plan search – where students are taught how to identify key concepts, construct a keyword search and identify key resources.
2. Find relevant information – where students are taught how to use a variety of resources including legal databases.
3. Evaluate information – where students are taught the generic skills of how to evaluate and assess how useful and relevant information is for assignments, and examines the limitations to using the internet.
4. Organise and use information – where students are taught about copyright and plagiarism, how to keep records of information and how to write a bibliography
5. Communicate and review information – where students are taught how to get help to complete assignments and how to apply any feedback received to improve future assignments and information skills.

Thus, these results show that both programmes provide a wide range of skills training and are not restricted to just legal research skills in particular. Both courses cover the same areas – planning a search, locating information, evaluating resources, copyright and plagiarism issues. Further, the sections appear to have a logical flow, where students are able to move from one section to the other in a coherent way. For instance, students learn about how to locate information before learning how to evaluate it. Therefore, this general structure can be considered for an online course at

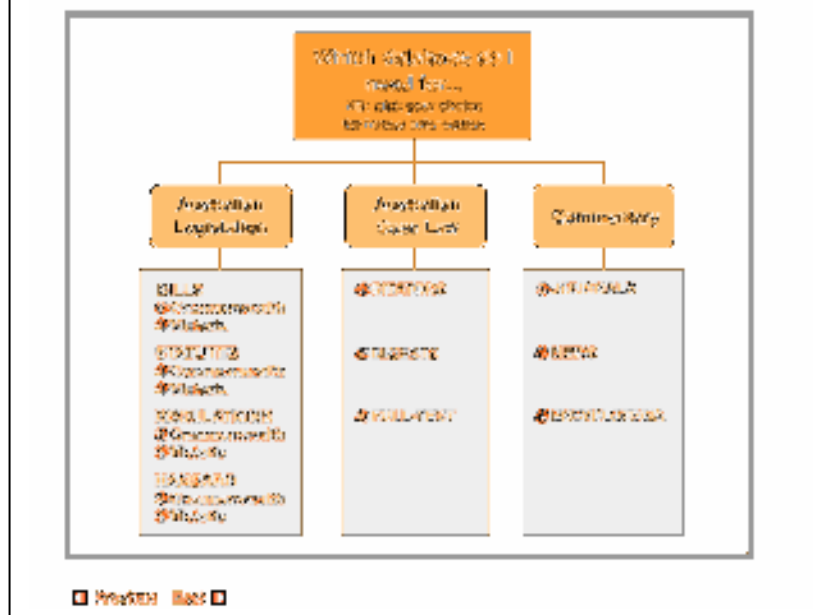
SOAS where particular issues relating to those students can be incorporated – such as how to write a legal essay for those with English as a second language, or how to cite foreign and international law materials properly.

Following on from this, the programmes were easy to follow as they both used clear language and do not confuse the student. In addition, the amount of text the student has to scroll through for each section were in manageable chunks – in that they were small enough so that the student will read it without becoming too overwhelmed. The InfoSkills programme uses small graphics to break up large sections of text whereas the LIST tutorial contained even small proportions of text and summarised a lot of the information to make it easier to read. Likewise, The Infoskills programme provides a separate section containing a summary highlighting the key concepts of each particular area. These are useful as the student is able to use them as a quick point of reference that they can return to at a later date.

It is clear, therefore, that any online course should divide the sections into small portions and use small amounts of text. More detailed guides on how to search resources can be provided as attachments and available for those students who require more assistance and need more detailed instructions.

When looking at the content providing specific legal research skills training, it is clear that only electronic resources are mainly being covered. The LIST programme goes through how to use subscription databases (Lexis and Westlaw) as well as free websites. It also provides a useful interactive map of which database is needed for each type of material (see Figure 4.2.2.a). This is useful as students can refer back to it and use it as a quick reference. As SOAS students will require knowledge in many databases including foreign and international resources, it can be quite confusing to know which one to use. This is a useful aid to students learning and should be incorporated in an online course of SOAS students.

Figure 4.2.2.a: Screenshot of LIST – Interactive map for finding information



Further, the LIST programme mention printed sources of legal materials, yet does not provide any detailed instructions on how to use them. Alternatively, the InfoSkills programme provides a separate face-to-face training session on printed materials and therefore does not mention hard copy resources during the online course. However, it also provides information on how to search both subscription databases and other free resources. Moreover, it is clear that both programmes show that all areas of researching legal materials can be covered. Both courses display instructional materials in the same logical order – going through how to search for case law, legislation and then secondary materials. This indicates that any online course for SOAS students should use the same structure and provide information on electronic resources, subscription and free websites, as well as print resources.

Quizzes and self tests have been discussed in detail above, however, it is important to note that both programmes use them in a way that relate to the learning outcomes and help to reinforce the training and instructional materials provided. It has been shown that LIST provides simpler exercises throughout the course which presents the student with more opportunities to receive formative feedback. Further, these exercises are woven throughout the course so that students cannot jump from one quiz to the next – they have to work through each section.

Both programmes provide feedback to the quizzes and exercises and these vary from simple 'correct' or 'wrong' answers to more detailed feedback. The LIST programme contains a number of main quizzes which are more complicated than the simple

exercises discussed above (see Figure 4.2.2.b). They must be completed after each section and requires the student to use all the skills they have learnt so far. They use a variety of formats to construct the questions including simple multiple choice, however, the student is also required to type in what they believe is the correct answer. Therefore, these main quizzes are quite useful as they help summarise the key concepts of the previous section and requires the student to think more about the answers. Students are not given any instructions as to which resource the answers can be found in and thus, the questions are more challenging.

Figure 4.2.2.b: Screenshot of LIST - Finding Legislation quiz



However, these quizzes do not provide any detailed instant feedback, only a separate results page which provides an overall score (see Figure 4.2.2.c below). On the other hand, the smaller quizzes found throughout the course does provide detailed feedback (see Figure 4.2.2.d below); although they may be quite simple they give the student the opportunity to learn why they have got something wrong. This can also be seen in the InfoSkills tutorial where simple feedback is used for the small quizzes found throughout the programme (see Figure 4.2.2.e below). Moreover, students working through the LIST programme are only allowed three attempts to answer all types of quizzes correctly. This encourages the student to find the correct answer first time and puts some pressure on the students to learn the relevant skills.

Figure 4.2.2.c: Screenshot of LIST - Using Legislation feedback

The screenshot shows the LISTOnline interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links: Home, Help, Logout. Below it, the title 'LISTOnline LEGAL INFORMATION SKILLS TUTORIAL' is displayed. A sidebar on the left lists various resources: Objectives, Hard Copy vs Electronic, Primary & Secondary Sources, Case Law, Legislation, Secondary Sources, The Internet, and Databases. The main content area shows a quiz titled 'Quiz, Legal Information Skills Tutorial, Using Legislation'. Below the title, there's a section for 'Your Final Scores' which includes a table with columns: #, Question, Type, Your Mark, Marks, and After Remain / % Feed. The table contains three rows of quiz questions, all of which were answered correctly (1/1). At the bottom of the table, the 'Total Marks' are shown as 3/3 (100%).

#	Question	Type	Your Mark	Marks	After Remain / % Feed
1	Links to scanned images of the Electricity Safety Act 1998. Front cover Page 1 Endnotes This reprint of the Electricity Safety Act 1998 Incorporated amendments up to what date?	Multiple Choice	1	1	
2	Links to scanned images of the Electricity Safety Act 1998. Front cover Page 1 Endnotes What date was the second reading speech made in the Legislative Council for the Electricity Safety Act 1998?	Multiple Choice	1	1	
3	Links to scanned images of the Electricity Safety Act 1998. Front cover Page 1 Endnotes What date did the Electricity Safety Act 1998 receive assent?	Multiple Choice	1	1	
Total Marks				3/3 (100%)	

At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with the text: 'Your session will expire at: Jan 15 '05, 12:05 AM (Your session will expire if you do not interact with Quizlike in any way). Current Server Date/Time: Fri, Jan 14 2005, 10:23 AM'.

Figure 4.2.2.d: Screenshot of LIST - Legal Searches quiz and feedback

The screenshot shows a quiz titled 'QUIZ: Legal Searches'. The question asks: 'Create a two term search string that will find records containing all four of the words below. Drag the search terms into the boxes to build the most effective search string.' The words provided are 'imperialism', 'and', 'sovereignty', 'sovereign*', and 'imperial*'. The user has submitted the search string 'sovereign* imperial*'. Below the submission, there is a feedback message: 'Please try again. Remember that the * is a wildcard or truncation symbol.' At the bottom right, it says 'You have 2 attempt(s) remaining'. At the bottom left, there are 'Previous' and 'Next' buttons.

Further to this, quizzes within the InfoSkills programme and found throughout the sections, allow for an infinite number of tries to get the answer right. This means that if a student chooses the wrong answer, the feedback suggests what the correct answer might be and in the case of multiple answer questions, even provides the full answer so there is no need to finish or repeat the test. A student could go through each multiple choice answers and as they have an unlimited amount of attempts, can just discover the correct answer or the feedback will provide the right answer for them (see Figure

4.2.2.e). This is not useful in terms of aiding learning nor does it test the students' knowledge sufficiently.

Figure 4.2.2.e: Screenshot of InfoSkills – Westlaw: finding legislation quiz and Feedback

The screenshot shows the 'InfoSkills for Law' interface on the Westlaw website. The top navigation bar includes 'myWebCT', 'Check Browser', 'Log Out', and 'Help'. Below the navigation bar, the breadcrumb trail reads 'Homepage > 2. Find relevant information > Westlaw: finding legislation'. The main content area is titled 'Searching for legislation covering specific topics' and includes a paragraph explaining that users need to select 'UK Legislation' from the shortcuts list. Below this is 'Activity 9' with four numbered steps: 1. Return to the Westlaw front page by clicking 'Welcome' on the menu bar; 2. Underneath the heading 'Shortcuts' on the left hand side of the screen, open the drop-down menu under the title 'Quick Search'; 3. Select 'UK Legislation'; 4. From this screen you can enter keywords to find acts covering specific topics. A text prompt asks the user to enter 'dangerous dogs' in the 'Term(s)' box. Below this, a multiple-choice question asks which act is not listed in the first page of results for 'dangerous dogs'. The options are: ☐ Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, ☐ Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, ☐ Courts Act 2003, and ☒ Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. A green feedback box on the right states: 'Correct answer! The Police and Criminal Evidence Act does not cover laws about dangerous dogs.' At the bottom, there is a prompt to click the next page icon in the action menu to carry on to 'Westlaw: finding journal articles'.

The InfoSkills programme also provides more formal quizzes where the questions are not related to finding information, rather how the student would react in a certain situation (see Figure 4.2.2.f below). This is useful as it helps the student learn what they should do in similar circumstances and shows what the best approach would be to tackle any problems.

Figure 4.2.2.f: Screenshot of InfoSkills – Self Test

The screenshot shows the 'InfoSkills for Law' interface on the Westlaw website, specifically the 'Self Test' section. The top navigation bar includes 'myWebCT', 'Check Browser', 'Log Out', and 'Help'. Below the navigation bar, the breadcrumb trail reads 'Homepage > 1. Define topic & plan search > 1.3 Summary'. The main content area is titled 'Self Test' and 'Multiple Choice Questions'. It contains two numbered questions. Question 1 asks the user to select the solution for the statement: 'I don't really understand the assignment question.' The options are: ☐ Carry on anyway, I'll probably get something right., ☒ Look at my assignment question and try to break it down into its key ideas. If I'm still not sure, I'll ask my tutor., and ☐ Choose an element of the assignment I do understand and write about that. Question 2 asks the user to select the solution for the statement: 'There are a few words I don't understand.' The options are: ☐ Use a dictionary or encyclopaedia to help work out what the words mean. If I'm still not sure, ask my tutor., ☐ Try to find books about the words you do understand and see if they will shed light on the others., and ☐ Just start writing the assignment. A green feedback box on the right states: 'Correct Well done. Once you understand the assignment title you can look for keywords and synonyms and be able to plan your search for information to answer the assignment question.'

Ultimately, both programmes show that activities throughout the tutorial, as a whole, are useful to reinforce what has just been learnt. Further, it is clear that detailed feedback is useful to convey to the student how they have been progressing. Students should be encouraged to complete the quizzes for this reason, therefore, the content of any feedback should be looked at carefully so as not to reduce the value of the quiz.

To summarise, any online course should include the following features:

- Logical structure – The main outline of the course should follow the general areas of:
 - Planning a search
 - Locating Information – specifically case law, legislation and secondary materials such as journal articles.
 - Evaluating Resources
 - Copyright and Plagiarism issues
- Manageable chunks of text – small portions of text within the course so that students will read it.
- Instructional material for electronic resources, both subscription and free, and print resources - all provided in a variety of formats.
- Instant feedback from quizzes so students can receive formative feedback

4.2.3 Impact on Users

As discussed in section 3.3 above, it is difficult to evaluate the impact a skills training course has on learning, unless an observation study is used. Unfortunately, as mentioned, an observation study could not be organised due to time constraints. Likewise, only limited student feedback could be gathered from the relevant institutions.

For the LIST programme student feedback was gathered to see how students regard the skills training. The initial feedback was that it was much easier and far more effective than “lecturing” to up to 60 students in one classroom (Smith Mclaurin & Presser, 2004). It was noted that students felt there was too much reading online and they wanted more interactivity. However, as discussed in the previous section, the LIST programme contains a small amount of text that were easy to read and digest. This shows that students will just not sit and read online and will prefer more interactive activities. This view is supported by the results of a questionnaire where 87% of students agreed or agreed strongly that the database simulations helped them to

understand how the various databases can be used. Likewise, 86% of students agreed or agreed strongly that the quiz questions assisted learning. Ultimately, the overwhelming response was that students agreed or strongly agreed that their knowledge of legal research has improved (95%).

Further criteria involved the observation of students working through the course – as discussed above in section 3.4 this was not possible for this research project. However, this was a form of evaluation used at the University of Melbourne by librarians who observed students working through LIST. Smith McLaurin & Presser (2004) notes that students were found to be very engaged and focused in the course - they took to it easily and obviously got a lot out of it.

Unfortunately, at the time this research was undertaken there was no available feedback from students on the InfoSkills course. However, the PoLeR course mentioned above, and provided by the same Institution has provided limited student feedback (Big Blue Project website). These results will be mentioned here as the InfoSkills course was constructed in the vein of the PoLeR course and was modified in light of student feedback from students working through PoLeR. These results will not inform the final framework as it is not possible to discover the impact the InfoSkills course has on students. However, it is useful to note how a similar course, run by the same institution, has impacted on students' performance.

The majority of students felt that they had applied the skills which they had learnt from PoLeR to other parts of the course, and that their electronic research skills had improved as a result of using the course. Ultimately, the majority of students felt that the course proved useful in the completion of their assessed coursework and in improving their level of skill in searching electronic resources (Big Blue Project website). As stated above, since PoLeR was introduced, the pass rate for the Practical Legal Research has gone from 75% to 98%.

Evidently, any online course can only help improve a student's legal research skills rather than be a detriment the delivery of such skills. Students appear to be more than happy to use such a training programme and perhaps prefer it to being taught in a face-to-face environment.

Therefore, as these results show, the objectives to produce and use an evaluation policy to evaluate two current legal research skills training programs have been met.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Framework for SOAS students

The questionnaire and evaluation results, as discussed above, highlighted certain areas that need to be considered when designing an online legal research skills training programme for SOAS students. The following recommendations have been made after careful consideration of these results.

Firstly, any online course designed specifically for SOAS students should provide clear instructions on how to use the VLE and use simple language - to cater for those students with English as a second language. SOAS students require a lot of assistance when they first start the law course as they need to find English materials as well as foreign and international material; therefore, they need to be taught how to conduct basic searches. The course should be made as basic and as simple as possible at first, with the view to allowing more detailed instructional material to be added at a later date.

An online course for SOAS students should also consider issues of timing, where there is a need to design and implement a course aimed for the greatest impact and most practical use to students. For instance, if the course were to be embedded in the curriculum and made compulsory, students should complete it before the first assignment is attempted. Further, when considering the legal research skills SOAS students in particular need to develop, access to certain sections of the course should be withheld until students have completed basic training. For instance, students should, firstly, learn how to search resources containing English legal materials as this will give them the basic foundation for searching other regional resources. Thus, once students successfully complete self tests and quizzes on how to search for English materials, they can then access training material on how to use other regional resources such as the Chinese database Isinolaw.

Any online course should provide a balance of how material is delivered for students who learn in different ways. Instructional materials should be available in a variety of formats. Online text should be made available throughout the course in small proportions – so that students are not overwhelmed by the amount of reading required by them, while downloadable guides should be made available as attachments to provide more detailed information.

As feedback from the LIST tutorial showed, students indicated that they wanted more interactivity, thus, any online course should contain a number of quizzes, exercises and simulations throughout the course. These will engage the student and help those who learn best by being actively involved in the training.

Likewise, as the questionnaire results show, SOAS students do not seem to learn how to use a database effectively in a face-to-face situation – they require constant practice using the databases. Therefore, an online tutorial working through certain aspects of the databases would be more beneficial to SOAS students. While simulations, similar to the LIST programme, should be used to provide SOAS students with the opportunity to practice certain resources in a controlled setting.

Any online course for SOAS students should make good use of the assessment tools within the VLE to incorporate feedback and reflection. Short quizzes or activities should be provided throughout the programme and in a variety of formats including, multiple choice, multiple answer, click and drag etc. It is also important to ensure that students work through the text and instructional material before attempting the short exercises – they cannot be allowed to jump from just one quiz to the next without learning the relevant skills properly. Therefore, the short quizzes should be woven into the structure of the course and relate to the learning objectives in order to motivate the student to learn and help recognise their strengths and weaknesses. Likewise, main quizzes or assignments should also be provided at the end of each section and should summarise the key concepts allowing the students to reflect on what they have learnt so far.

As found in the LIST and InfoSkills programmes, it is quite easy for the students to skip quizzes or exercises and continue with the tutorial. Further, as found in the questionnaire results, SOAS students can be quite lazy and apathetic. Therefore, it is important that any online course is designed to ensure that students must complete any exercises – and are a compulsory part of the course. For example, the quizzes can take the form of a particular scenario so that students can relate to the questions and would want to complete the quizzes to find out the conclusion of problem. Students could be given a scenario which involves a particular case being taken through the court system and the student would need to find relevant information to help solve the problem. By using a real-life scenario students will, perhaps, be more likely to want to attempt the quizzes in order to see the problem through to the end. Further to this, certain sections can be withheld until the students complete certain quizzes. This was found useful in the PoLeR course where the final assessment was not released onto a

particular students VLE page until they had completed the quiz and received a 50% or over pass rate.

Another way to get students interested in completing the training online is to incorporate animations, like the LIST programme, where students work with the animated characters to solve problems and learn with them about particular legal research skills. This can be more beneficial for undergraduate students as they are generally young and would appreciate the humour behind it. However, if the course were to be expanded to include postgraduate students, the use of animations might not work as well. Postgraduate students might find the animation too simple and perhaps too would be too immature for them.

The use of collaborative learning should also be considered for SOAS students. Feedback from the LIST programme showed that students enjoyed and gained a lot from the experience of working with others. This is something that can be incorporated into the SOAS online course where students could be asked to work in groups to complete certain assignments. This would help students to develop their legal research skills as it involves the students learning from each other by enquiry and challenge. It would also help overcome the problem international students' face when first starting a course of study in another country – that of feeling isolated and would help them to become more involved in life at SOAS. However, collaborative learning would only work if the course is embedded in the curriculum and made compulsory - where students can be organised into groups more easily and the completed assignment can be marked and assessed by the lecturer.

Finally, the structure of the online course should follow the example of the LIST and InfoSkills programmes by including sections on planning a search, locating information, evaluating resources and other relevant issues such as plagiarism, copyright and how to write an essay. The 'locating information' section should be catered towards law students in particular with tutorials on how to search legal subscription databases and free websites with key resources being highlighted and detailed guides provided. Print resources of legal material should also be covered, with pictures provided within the course along with general instructions on how to use them. This ensures all resources are being promoted and SOAS students are aware of and familiar with the resources available to them – in the hope that it will give them more confidence in their ability and increase their use. Further, this section should also cover all aspects to legal research – including how to find case law, legislation and secondary materials as well as how to cite this information correctly. The other sections will cover the more generic skills

which all students should develop. For instance, the section covering how to plan a search will include the more generic skills of how to recognise key terms and concepts and how to construct a Boolean search effectively. Likewise, the 'evaluating resources' section should include the generic skills of how to assess the reliability of various resources. Students should also learn about how to write a successful law essay, including copyright and plagiarism issues. These areas will provide the foundation for all students on how to search effectively and efficiently.

To summarise, an online course for SOAS students should provide:

- Clear navigation and language
- Timely sessions to coincide with essay deadlines and exams
- A logical structure looking at four main areas:
 - Planning a Search
 - Locating Information
 - Evaluating Information
 - Communicating Information
- Training in all aspects of legal research and all key resources
- Instructional material available in a variety of ways
- Graphics and images throughout the course to break up text
- Active learning
 - Quizzes to allow for reflection:
 - Small simple exercises woven into tutorial throughout, in a variety of formats
 - Main exercises with more complex questions at the end of each section to summarise key concepts
 - Simulations of databases to provide plenty of practice
- Engaging and interesting material such as humorous images and animations
- Collaborative learning to help support students general learning and integration into life at University

5.2 Limitations

One of the most obvious flaws to this research project is the fact that only two online legal research skills training courses were evaluated. A wider variety of VLE courses could have been examined, looking at how a wide-range of institutions are delivering legal research skills. Consequently, it would have been possible to gain more

comprehensive and thorough research which in turn provides more detailed and complete results. However, as discussed above in section 3.2, there are very few institutions using the capabilities of a VLE to deliver legal research skills training and the two courses evaluated in this research project were, therefore, deemed to be adequate. They provided sufficient and satisfactory results which highlighted certain general trends to delivering legal research skills training online.

A further limitation to this project was the lack of any observation studies on students working through the tutorial or student feedback on how they regard the course, to help evaluate the impact the course has on a students' learning. Therefore, it was not possible to gain an insight into whether students' engage with the tutorials, or to see whether it improves the student's legal research skills. As explained in section 3.4 above, this was impossible to arrange due to time constraints. Although some student feedback was provided by the University of Melbourne from the LIST programme which proved useful, it was not possible to gather student feedback from the InfoSkills course. This made it difficult to effectively evaluate both courses and is, thus, something that could be considered for future research (discussed below).

5.3 Future application and research

The recommendations resulting from this research project have a wider applicability. Other courses can use the structure of the framework (discussed above) to construct an online skills training programme for their own subject. The results have highlighted the main generic skills every student should be able to develop – constructing a search strategy, and evaluating and communicating the information found. Likewise, the results have also highlighted the best use of the technological aspects of a VLE, such as the interactive tools. These recommendations are not dependent on legal research skills and can, therefore, be used in other courses. Thus, the framework as discussed above for legal research skills can be adapted by other courses within SOAS and ultimately, other institutions, for any particular subject.

Further, this framework has been constructed with the needs of undergraduate students' in mind. However, it can be more widely applied to include postgraduate students studying at SOAS, where the course can be expanded to include more detailed instruction. Ultimately, future research into the needs of SOAS postgraduates students should be conducted to help understand what, within the online course, would need to be altered to cater for such students. Likewise, any other institution wishing to

take on board these recommendations should consider the needs of their own students and whether this framework would be beneficial to them.

The implementation of such a training programme can benefit SOAS students tremendously. Not only will they be able to develop adequate legal research skills they will also develop more IT skills in general and, therefore, become more IT literate. This has future implications for all SOAS students if the framework was incorporated into all subjects and courses.

As this research project was unable to effectively evaluate both courses (see above), it is possible that future research will be able to remedy this. The involvement of lecturers during this project was invaluable, and has helped to highlight the importance of providing legal research skills in general within the School. Students have now been made aware of how important it is to complete these training courses and the librarian has been given more support by the law department. However, the involvement of the academics could have been used to a greater advantage. It would have been possible to arrange students within a particular course to work through the two online training programmes during their own timetabled lessons. Students can receive appropriate training and provides the opportunity to observe the students engaging with the course. In this way, it would be possible to see the impact a skills training course has on a student first hand. This should be taken into consideration when conducting any future research in this particular area.

Finally, this research project has highlighted the need to investigate more fully the approach to embedding skills training within the course curriculum. As stated above, being able to link training with assignments is more useful as it forces students to develop satisfactory skills training. It is, therefore, possible to investigate how other institutions have embedded skills training with their courses, how they have assessed a students learning and how they have incorporated this into the VLE. Likewise, further research can be undertaken into how a librarian can be involved in the teaching of legal research skills – should law librarians become the teacher. It was found that, whilst researching for this project, there are very few published materials on this subject. Therefore, there is scope for future investigation into whether skills training should be conducted by the academics themselves, or by law librarians.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix I - Evaluation Policy

		WebCT – InfoSkills Tutorial			In House - LIST		
		Yes	No	Comments	Yes	No	Comments
VLE Technological aspects	Is the VLE easy to access?						
	Is the platform reliable?						
	Are there clear, simple guidelines for navigating the VLE?						
	Are there any supporting graphics, images, diagrams?						
	Are students actively involved in the tutorial?						
	Are there any interactive tools (quizzes, simulations, animations or discussion boards)?						
Content & User Satisfaction	Is there a clear statement of aims, objectives or learning outcomes?						
	Is the structure of the content organised into manageable chunks?						
	Is the structure of the content logical? Does it flow?						
	Do they use clear language?						
	Are the tutorials easy to follow?						
	How do self-tests/quizzes relate to the learning outcomes?						
	Do self-tests/quizzes reinforce tutorials?						
	Is there any immediate feedback?						

Content Cont.	Are all aspects of searching legal materials covered (Cases, Legislation and Journals)?						
	Are electronic sources covered?						
	Are printed sources covered?						
Impact on Users	Do the tutorials meet all objectives or learning outcomes?						
	How do students engage with the tutorials?						
	Do students find tutorials easy/hard?						
	Do students find interactive tools useful?						
	Do students feel they have adequate research skills after completion?						
	Have the tutorials improved research skills?						

8.2 Appendix II - University of Oxford Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a research project into how students go about using legal databases after Unit 1 of the LRSP. Completing the questionnaire is voluntary, however your cooperation in doing so will be greatly appreciated. There are 20 questions, and space to write a comment. All responses are recorded electronically and anonymously, and once submitted cannot be withdrawn. Whether or not you complete the questionnaire will not affect your assessment for the LRSP. The results of the survey will be taken into consideration when planning the LRSP in future years.

The research is being carried out by Sandra Meredith as part of a Master of Arts (Educ) degree with La Trobe University, Australia, under the supervision of Dr Johann le Roux, Latrobe University, and Dr Paul Ashwin, Institute for the Advancement of University Learning, Oxford University. HREC No. A1112/03.

You will need about 5 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

1. Are you male or female? M F

2. How often do you use legal databases or the internet to access law reports (cases)?
At least once a week Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Never

Please skip the next question if you answered Never.

3. Which law reports databases do you use? You may tick more than one.

Justis Law Reports

Lexis law reports

Westlaw summary

Westlaw full text law reports

BAILLI transcripts

4. How often do you use legal databases or the internet to access statutes (ie. Justis, Lexis, Westlaw or the HMSO)?

At least once a week Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Never

Please skip the next question if you answered Never.

5. Which statutes databases do you use?

Justis Statutes

Lexis Legislation

Westlaw Legislation

HMSO web site

Other web sites

6. How often do you use the legal or journal databases (ie. Lexis, Westlaw, or journals on TD Net) to access journal articles?

At least once a week Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Never

7. Have you used the online tutorials for the LRSP since the Unit 1 class?

Yes No

8. How often do you use the legal or journal databases (ie Lexis, Westlaw, Justis, TD Net) to look for materials that are NOT on your reading list?

At least once a week Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Never

9. How often do you use search engines (eg google, yahoo) to search the internet for materials that are NOT on your reading list?

At least once a week Once a fortnight Once a month Once a term Never

The following is a set of statements about using legal resources and about legal research skills. For each statement please tick whether you agree strongly, agree, are neutral (or don't know), disagree or disagree strongly with it. (Tick boxes are provided for each of these after each statement.)

10. I've learnt everything I need to know about using legal databases by trial and error.

11. I don't need to use the databases because nearly everything is in the textbooks.

12. One of the key reasons I use databases is to look up references from the textbooks/lectures.

13. One of the key reasons I use databases is because they make it easy to find the headnote and important parts of the judgement in law reports.

14. One of the key reasons I use databases is to get someone else's point of view on a case or issue.

15. I don't need to know how to do legal research in databases until/if I become a trainee lawyer.

16. It is easier to find journal articles in the library than in legal databases.

17. I don't have time to read beyond what is on the reading list.

18. I know which databases hold which sets of law reports (cases).

19. Unit 1 of the LRSP will be useful for doing my own legal research.

20. Please write any comments you have on factors affecting your usage of legal databases in the space below.

21. Please use this space to write any other comments you may have about using legal databases or about this questionnaire.

8.3 Appendix III – SOAS Questionnaire

Legal Research Skills Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a research project into how students use legal skills training and online resources. Completing the questionnaire is voluntary, however your cooperation in doing so will be greatly appreciated. There are 30 questions, and space to write a comment.

The results of the survey will be taken into consideration when planning future legal skills training.

You will need about 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

A. ABOUT YOU

- 1. Gender** Male ☐ Female ☐
- 2. Degree Level** Undergraduate ☐ Postgraduate ☐
- 3. If Undergraduate, please state year** 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐

B. LEGAL RESEARCH SKILLS

- 4. Did you attend a legal research skills session given by the Library?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. If No, you did not attend because:

(Please tick one box)

Session times during the day were inconvenient		No sessions were provided	
Session was too early in the term		Already knew how to use legal databases	
Session was too late in the term		Other <i>(please state)</i>	

6. How often do you use legal databases or the Internet to access law reports (cases)?

(Please tick one box)

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never <i>(go to question 8)</i>	
Once a month			

7. Which law reports databases do you use?

(You may tick more than one)

Justis Weekly Law Reports		WorldLII transcripts	
Lexis law reports		Isinolaw	
Westlaw law reports		Other <i>(please state)</i>	
BAILLI transcripts			

8. How often do you use legal databases or the Internet to access statutes (ie. Lexis, Westlaw or the HMSO)?

(Please tick one box)

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never <i>(go to question 10)</i>	
Once a month			

9. Which statutes databases do you use?

(You may tick more than one)

Lexis Legislation		WorldLII Website	
Westlaw Legislation		Other <i>(Please state)</i>	
HMSO web site			

10. How often do you use the legal or journal databases (ie. Lexis, Westlaw, or Heinonline) to access Journals/journal articles?

(Please tick one box)

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never	
Once a month			

11. How often do you use other Journal Databases (ie. EBSCO, JSTOR or IngentaConnect)?

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never <i>(go to question 13)</i>	
Once a month			

12. Which other journal databases do you use?*(You may tick more than one)*

EBSCOHost		IngentaConnect	
JSTOR		Other (<i>Please state</i>)	

13. How often do you use the Law Subject Guide on the SOAS Library website?

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never (<i>go to question 15</i>)	
Once a month			

14. Which sections do you use?*(You may tick more than one)*

Internet Gateways		Reference Sources	
By Country/Region		Research and Teaching	
UK law		Other (<i>Please state</i>)	

15. How often do you use search engines (eg google, yahoo) to search the Internet for materials that are on your reading list?

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never	
Once a month			

16. How often do you use the legal or journal databases (e.g Lexis, Westlaw, JSTOR etc) to look for materials that are NOT on your reading list?

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never	
Once a month			

17. How often do you use search engines (eg google, yahoo) to search the Internet for materials that are NOT on your reading list?

At least once a week		Once a term	
Once a fortnight		Never	
Once a month			

The following is a set of statements about using legal resources and about legal research skills. For each statement please tick whether you agree strongly, agree, are neutral (or don't know), disagree or disagree strongly with it.

		Agree Strongly	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
18	I've learnt everything I need to know about using legal databases by trial and error.					
19	I don't need to use the databases because nearly everything is in the textbooks.					
20	One of the key reasons I use databases is to look up references from the textbooks/lectures.					
21	One of the key reasons I use databases is because they make it easy to find the headnote and important parts of the judgement in law reports.					
22	One of the key reasons I use databases is to get someone else's point of view on a case or issue.					
23	I don't need to know how to do legal					

	research in databases until/if I become a trainee lawyer.					
24	It is easier to find journal articles in the library than in legal databases.					
25	I don't have time to read beyond what is on the reading list.					
26	I know which databases hold which sets of law reports (cases).					
27	Legal Skills Sessions would be useful for doing my own legal research.					

28. Please write any comments you have on factors affecting your usage of legal databases in the space below.

29. Please use this space to write any other comments you may have about using legal databases or about this questionnaire.

30. Please provide your contact details if you would like a response to your comments and/or legal research skills training.

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.